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THE
LIFE
OF
JOHN WYCLIFFE.

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BY

THOMAS MURRAY, F. A. S. Scot.

1792-1

AUTHOR OF THE LITERARY HISTORY OF GALLOWAY,
LIVES OF SAMUEL RUTHERFORD, AND
ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON, &c.

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P R E F A C E.

VARIOUS Lives of Wycliffe have appeared; of which that by the Rev. John Lewis, published in 1719, has long been known as the best and most ample. A very judicious Life of the Reformer was prefixed to the edition of his Translation of the New Testament, published in 1810 under the superintendance of the Rev. Mr. Baber of the British Museum. There are various other Memoirs of this

celebrated man, one for example by Dr. Milner in his Ecclesiastical History. The best brief sketch on the subject we owe to Mr. P. F. Tytler, the well known author of Lives of the Admirable Crichton and of Sir Thomas Craig, and who is now employed in composing a History of Scotland, one volume of which is already in the hands of the public. But the labours of these authors, and of others, did not exhaust the subject. On the contrary, there was a good deal left to correct, and not a little to add; and it gives us pleasure to say that this task has recently been performed in a most satisfactory way by Mr. Vaughan. His work, which consists of two octavo volumes, and which was published in 1828, is entitled, "The Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe, D. D. illustrated principally from his unpublished MSS.; with a prelimi-

nary view of the Papal system, and of the state of the Protestant doctrine in Europe, to the commencement of the fourteenth century, by Robert Vaughan." This production is distinguished equally for minute research, sound judgment, and right principles. Mr. Vaughan is intimately acquainted with contemporary history, both ecclesiastical and civil, and has perused almost all the writings that have been ascribed to Wycliffe. He has supplied many defects and corrected many errors: and we regard his work as, on the whole, one of the most authentic and interesting pieces of biography which recent times have produced. His book, in short, is one which all who wish to study the Life of this early Reformer, and the history of the age in which he lived, will find to be of indispensable importance.

Under such circumstances, having

been applied to by the present publisher to compose for him a brief Memoir of this illustrious Reformer, calculated for general circulation, I readily undertook the task. I did so because a Life of Wycliffe, of the size which was suggested, appeared to me to be a desideratum, and, if well executed, could not, I thought, but prove useful. In such motives this little volume had its origin. Though in the composition of it I have readily availed myself of the labours of my predecessors, the work of Mr. Vaughan is the chief source from which I have obtained materials. I have spared no pains to render the work suitable to the object I had in view, and, so far as its limits admitted, worthy of its subject. My wish has been, not to display extensive reading, or to enter upon any abstruse discussions, or to resolve contested points, but to

produce a narrative of simplicity and perspicuity of style, of a popular and practical tendency, and calculated both to interest and edify the general reader. How far this object has been attained it is not my province to determine.

**3, ALBANY STREET,
1st April, 1829.**

LIFE

OF

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

His birth and parentage.—The nature of his early education.—Enters the university of Oxford as a student, first of Queen's College, then of Merton's.—His great application and attainments.—He commences the study of the Bible.—A plague over-runs England.—His first publication; and remarks upon it.

JOHN WYCLIFFE, or de Wycliffe, the Father of the Reformation, not only in England but in all Europe, was born, it is supposed, about the year 1324. His baptismal name was John; and the surname, by which he was known, was not

derived from his parents, but was a local appellation—a mode of conferring such names common in that age. This appellation evidently determines the place of his birth; which must have been the village or parish of Wycliffe, situated within six miles of Richmond, in the county of York.* This opinion, which, though the truth of it has been sometimes doubted or disputed, has obtained the sanction of the most respectable authorities, and has, we think, been completely established by Mr. Vaughan; to whose learned “*Life of Wycliffe*,” recently published, we shall so often have occasion to refer. The family, from which our Reformer sprung, seems to have been of great antiquity, and possessed of considerable property, having, from the conquest till the year 1606, been lords of the manor, and patrons of the rectory of Wycliffe.†

* The name of our Reformer has been spelt nearly twenty different ways. For some notices on the subject, and reasons for the orthography adopted in the text, see Vaughan’s *Life of Wycliffe*, i. 224.

† Whitaker’s *Richmondshire*, article *Wycliffe*.

The subject of these pages appears to have been early destined for the church; but at what seminary he received his juvenile education we are not told. At this period, namely, in the fourteenth century, there was no reason to complain of the paucity of schools; for not only were there five hundred monastic establishments, to each of which was attached an institution of this kind, but schools were also established both in towns and in the larger villages.* In one or other of such seminaries, Wycliffe must have obtained his scholastic education. The Latin language at this time formed a branch of juvenile scholarship, and was taught with a zeal not afterwards surpassed; but Greek, as shall afterwards be mentioned, had not yet made its way into England. From Latin, the pupil was directed to the study of grammar and other elementary topics; but, whatever progress was made in the rudiments of learning at

* See the ample authorities quoted by Mr. Vaughan, who has placed this subject in a new light, vol. i. 226, 227.

school; a complete knowledge of the sciences, which were regarded as seven in number, was an achievement left for the university to effect.

Wycliffe, whose pecuniary means must be regarded as ample, entered as a commoner in Queen's College, Oxford, in the year 1340, at a time when he was sixteen years of age. This seminary had only been recently founded; and owing to the many disadvantages inseparable from its infant state, or to the great celebrity of Merton College, he soon removed to this latter institution, which belonged to the same university, and had been founded in the preceding century. This college, indeed, was at that time the most distinguished in Oxford. It had produced men whose genius and learning had thrown a lustre over their age, as well as over the seminary with which they had been connected. At the time also when Wycliffe became a student in it, it could boast of some of the most eminent characters of the period; men whose high talents and celebrity were well calculated to

inspire an ingenuous mind with ardour and emulation.*

At this time, however, Oxford was not remarkable for any thing more than the number of its students, amounting to no less than thirty thousand. From this circumstance, it is evident that society must, within the last century, when universities were first established, have made rapid progress in the learning that was then cultivated. Nor was this happy state of things confined to England. At the same period, ten thousand students voted in a question agitated in the university of Paris; and as graduates only were admitted to that privilege, the number of students must at least have equalled that of Oxford. At Bologna and other places, which could boast of such institutions, a similar result may be traced. "There were indeed," says Dr. Robertson, "few universities in Europe at that time; but such a number of

* For an account of these men, (of whom our limits will not allow us to speak) see Leland, *De Scrip. Brit.* Cave, *Scrip. Eccl. Hist. Literaria*. Lewis's *Life of Wickliff*, and Baber's *Life of Wickliff*.

students may nevertheless be produced as a proof of the extraordinary ardour with which men applied to the study of science in those ages.*

Under such circumstances did Wycliffe become a student in Merton College. The inducements to application and study by which he was surrounded, were many and powerful. Nor were they thrown away upon him. He was endued with a mind distinguished equally for a thirst of knowledge, and for a capacity of acquiring it; and he assiduously and successfully availed himself of all the advantages he enjoyed.

The only object of academical instruction at that time seems to have been to form able disputants, and subtle dialecticians; an accomplishment which became to the inmates of colleges, what the tournament had long been to the knight and the baron. It was justly regarded as subjecting the attainments and capacity of every student to the most unequivocal test; inasmuch as it

* Robertson's *History of Charles V.* vol. i. App. Note xxviii.

required in the person who laid claim to it; an extent of knowledge, a promptitude of mind, and a command of the Latin tongue, (the language used in all dialectic exhibitions,) by which no person of inferior talents and attainments could be distinguished. Wycliffe ardently devoted the powers of his mind to the study of that scholastic philosophy and scholastic theology, by which at that time the human mind was so captivated and enslaved; and in the contests to which we refer, he soon became remarkable for all the subtlety and sophistry with which the dialectic art could invest him. He not only stood unrivalled among the most eminent Doctors of the university, Profound, Venerable, Seraphic, Singular, for such titles did these pedants confer on each other; but it is even admitted by one of the most illiberal of his enemies, that his powers of debate were almost more than human. This admission is most honourable, not only to the person by whom, however reluctantly, it was made, but to him whose high endowments extorted it from an adversary; for though the discussions in

which these scholars engaged, were not of a very edifying nature, yet to attain to unrivalled excellence among distinguished men, whatever be the nature and character of the pursuit, bespeaks both intense application and talents of the highest order.*

Wycliffe, however, did not confine his attention only to these subjects. He united to them the study of the civil and canon laws; and that of the municipal law of England, of which important branches he appears from his writings to have had a most minute and perfect knowledge. The Roman and Canon systems of jurisprudence were at that time favourite branches of education; and as such our Reformer required to be acquainted with them. But the municipal law of England was not so generally studied: on the contrary, it was viewed by the scholars of that day with dislike and suspicion, and attempts had been made to exclude it from the course of a liberal educa-

* Knighton *De Eventibus Angliæ*, col. 2644, as quoted by Mr. Vaughan. Knighton, who was a canon of Leicester, was contemporary with Wycliffe.

tion.* But no prejudices or no authority could prevent Wycliffe from exercising his own judgment, or from devoting his attention to any department of science or literature which he thought might prove agreeable or useful. On this principle it was that he betook himself to this obnoxious study ; and thus early we find traces of that independence of thinking and steadfastness of purpose which so eminently marked his character, and which in after-life were productive of results so beneficial to the world.

But, being destined for the church, he did not content himself with these studies which we have been describing, nor even with the scholastic theology which prevailed : He commenced the study of the inspired volume itself, at that time so much overlooked, but which alone maketh wise unto salvation. Not only was the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures not regarded as necessary to the divine, but such knowledge was branded with contempt and at-

* Blackstone's *Commentaries*, Introduction.

tended with danger on the part of a church that laid claim to infallibility. Reason and philosophy, falsely so called, prevailed so widely and exclusively with respect to the investigation of divine truth, that the authority of the sacred volume itself was entirely disregarded; and not a few persons had been expelled from the various universities of Europe for having made the Bible their text-book, and for having drawn their doctrines from that only infallible source; and though some of our own countrymen had, prior to the days of Wycliffe, espoused the cause of these persecuted teachers, yet their interposition, however zealous and judicious, had been of no avail, and the evil remained in unimpaired vigour. "It had indeed," says Mosheim, "become too inveterate to admit of a remedy, and the passion for logic and metaphysics had grown so universal and so violent that neither remonstrances nor arguments could check its presumption, or allay its ardour."* Not-

* Mosheim's *Church History*, iii. 223. Lond. 1826. These words, though they were originally used in refer-

withstanding the danger to which he was exposed, our Reformer was led, by the grace of God, to undertake the study of the inspired volume.* “The same memory, which had gotten by heart many a useless page of Aristotle, was now more profitably employed in storing its secret chambers with better furniture from the book of life, and instead of plucking bitter fruit from the tree of scholastic theology, he wandered into the land of promise, and there culled the fresh and unwithering flowers of perfect wisdom, and eternal truth. In these studies he consumed the midnight watches, and prevented the dawn of the morning. At his meals, at his recreations,

ence to the 13th century, we regard as scarcely less true, when applied to the days of Wycliffe.

* He read it in a Latin translation, the same language in which he had perused the pages of Aristotle. A knowledge of Greek had not yet been introduced into England. Even in the middle of the subsequent century, such knowledge was regarded as a singular accomplishment. It was not till the taking of Constantinople by the Turks, in 1453, that this refined language came to be generally cultivated in the various countries of Europe.

at his walks in the summer season, the Bible was his constant companion, and often was he to be seen sitting in some of the shady avenues of Merton College, in the simple black gown, which was well suited to show to advantage his tall figure, and with that majestic countenance which God had given him, as an index of the truth, intently fixed on the book of life, reading with single-heartedness its golden pages, and trembling over its awful denunciations.* With such uncommon assiduity, indeed, did Wycliffe study the volume of inspiration, and such was his success in this good work, that he became distinguished above all his contemporaries for sound views of religion, drawn immediately from the Bible,—and he was honoured with the title of Evangelical Doctor.

Nor did our Reformer peruse the sacred book merely as a matter of literary curiosity, or without any regard to its high origin, or to the unspeakable importance of the di-

* Tytler's *Life of John Wickliff*, pp. 11, 12. Edin. 1825. 8vo.

vine truths which it contains. He studied it, that he might himself become wiser and better, and that he might be enabled, under a benevolent Providence, to disseminate "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ," throughout his native land. He incurred, as previously hinted, no small danger in thus so honourably devoting his time, and in preferring the perusal of the inspired volume, to the study of the works of the schoolmen. But it is the peculiar prerogative of high talents to command respect, even when they are employed in the investigation of subjects, from any cause the most unpopular or obnoxious. This literally took place, in the case under review. In the eyes of churchmen, the alleged fault of Wycliffe must have appeared of no inconsiderable magnitude; and they must have felt inclined to oppose him in this honourable pursuit, and to frustrate all the high hopes of doing good which he cherished. But his extraordinary abilities seem to have precluded such an attempt. He was permitted to prosecute undisturbed, his biblical

and religious studies,—a privilege, which a man of less eminent talents might not, it is thought, have been allowed to enjoy.

In addition to the Bible, he directed the most assiduous attention to the writings of the four fathers of the Latin church;* works which he often quotes and refers to, in his various publications in after life. With the most eminent writers on Christian theology, also, particularly those of his own country, he seems to have been well acquainted; a circumstance which he found of incalculable advantage in his future controversies with the church of Rome. His learning, therefore, was great; and this, with the intrepidity of heart and powers of mind, by which he was characterized, amply prepared him for the important discussions, in which it was afterwards his lot to engage.

Nor was it long till, under Providence, an event occurred, that he thought called upon him, as a person acquainted with the

* Lewis, p. 3. The Latin Fathers were St. Austin, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory, of whom, the first was his greatest favourite.

sacred volume, and as interested in disseminating sound religious principles, to appear before his countrymen as an author. The event to which we allude, was of the most calamitous kind, and such as the consciences of men have ever connected with the peculiar displeasure, and the direct agency of the Almighty. A pestilence, one of the most destructive in the annals of the world, originated in Tartary in the year 1345, and after desolating various countries of Asia and Africa, it passed over to the shores of Europe. Its devastations on this latter continent, were dreadful and extensive; and after a most deadly and loathsome march of two years, this portion of the globe was shaken from one end to the other, with a succession of earthquakes. Nor was England spared from its awful visitation. It began its devastating career there in 1348; ere long it reached the metropolis; and though it did not entirely disappear for eleven years, its virulence was confined to a few months; during which short time, not fewer than half of the whole inhabitants of London are calculated to have

perished. The infected generally died within a few hours: the strongest did not survive the third day. It extended its virulence to the lower animals also: so that the labours of husbandry were suspended. The courts of justice were closed; business of every kind was abandoned; death, or mourning for the dead, and despair shook the fabric of society to its very centre, and threatened the country with universal desolation.

Such a dreadful visitation could not but deeply affect the mind of every religious man. It evidently emanated, in the most emphatic sense, from the Almighty Ruler of the world, and was meant to answer an important purpose, in the ways of his providence. His "judgments were abroad in the earth," that "the inhabitants of the world might learn righteousness." In this light it was seen by the pious and learned person of whom we are treating. He recognised in it the hand and the working of God. He wished to learn the divine procedure, and to understand it clearly, "as the light that goeth forth." With unabated ardour, and with humble reverence, he persevered in

the study of the sacred oracles; and the important object he had in view, under present circumstances, was, that it might not be his condemnation, nor that of his countrymen, that "they had not known the judgments of the Lord." The result of this pious investigation and study, was a small treatise, entitled, "The Last Age of the Church," which appeared in 1356, eight years after the appearance of the plague in England, and when it had almost subsided. His imagination being struck, and his heart affected with the alarming event which was passing before his eyes, he imbibed the unfounded opinion, that the day of judgment was at hand, and that the close of the fourteenth century would be the end of the world. An opinion somewhat similar, had been entertained by many eminent writers before the time of Wycliffe; and therefore our reformer was only indulging in speculations which had obtained the sanction of the greatest names. Nor must it be forgotten, that even in the nineteenth century, at a time when the judgments of the Most High are not so striking and appalling as

in the days of Wycliffe, reveries, akin to those in question, have found many able and zealous supporters. Such being the case, we are called upon to regard this composition of Wycliffe, however erroneous in the views which it inculcates, with indulgence and respect, rather than ridicule, particularly when we take into consideration, the peculiarly striking circumstances under which it was written, the learning and plausibility by which its doctrines are characterized, and the piety and the purity of the motives in which it originated.*

But though the main object of the work has proved to be delusive, yet the author all along discovers in it principles and views superior to his age, and to the prejudices of his education, and which were the harbingers of the stand that he afterwards made against the errors and corruptions of the Romish church. We allude in particular to the sentiments which he expressed res-

* Lewis's *Life of Wicliff*, 3. But Mr. Vaughan (pp. 241—7.) is the only writer who gives a full account of this work, or of the circumstances to which it owed its existence.

pecting the character of the Popish clergy. While other writers, who have treated of the awful visitation which we have been describing, regarded it as having its origin in national sins, and in the general backsliding of the people, Wycliffe imputes it to another source, and devolves the burden of it on the selfish, sensual, and avaricious character of the ministers of the gospel. This was a bold step in these distant days, and showed a degree of intrepidity and independence, and liberality of thought, not common, and which is entitled to our highest admiration. He was fully aware of the gross corruptions of the church to which he belonged; he saw that a torrent of abuses had long been rushing in, which every one who wished well to his Zion, and the cause of Christ, was called upon to resist and expose. At this dreadful crisis, this truth struck him more forcibly than it might otherwise have done. He expected that the calamity with which Providence had been pleased to visit them, would have imparted a more spiritual character to the clerical office, and to those who possessed the

nomination to vacant benefices. But in this benevolent expectation, he was miserably deceived. The number of clergymen that had fallen victims to the ravages of the plague, was extremely great; but their place was supplied in the most disgraceful and regardless manner; persons grossly incompetent, both from want of talents and from want of character, to fill any spiritual office, were appointed; and England in general, exhibited the revolting spectacle of an ignorant, an immoral, and unholy priesthood. It was this that roused his religious sensibilities. "The honours of holy church," says he, "are given to unworthy men." In the days of an approaching calamity, which he foretold as preceding the end of the world, "Men," says he, "shall fall upon the priests, because of their sins; and shall cast them out of their fat benefices, and shall say, he came into his benefices by his kindred, and this by a covenant made before: he for his worldly service came into God's church, and this for money. Then every such priest shall cry, 'alas! alas! that no good spirit did dwell with me at

my coming into the church of God.' Men of holy church shall be despised as carion, —as dogs shall they be cast out in open places."

Such is the nature and the tendency of the first work which this distinguished man composed. We have been the more minute in giving an account of it, as we regard it as containing the germs of the principles which he so fearlessly inculcated in after life. "The opinions and the feeling disclosed in this production, though but imperfectly developed, are such as to prepare the reader to anticipate in John de Wycliffe, a devout opponent of the corruptions, which it describes with so much feeling and pathos. It is important to know, that even at this period of his history, the nefarious practices connected with the appointment of the clergy to the sphere of their duties, had so far shocked his piety, as to dispose him to expect a speedy and signal manifestation of the displeasure of Heaven. And if some years must pass before we meet the Reformer again as an author, it is but just to conclude that much of this interval was

employed in those efforts to check the evil of the times, and to diffuse that better knowledge of the faith and of the obligation of the Gospel, which are known to have enjoyed the whole of his energies at a later period. His capacity as an expositor of holy writ, and his views of the nature of religion and of pastoral duty, were already distinguished by many of the peculiarities which are observable in his latter compositions. In this, the thirty-second year of his age, we perceive his mind raised so far above the ordinary level, as to unfit him for an acquiescence in many existing customs, though sanctioned by the practice of ages and nations. But laborious application, intercourse with men, the storms of human life, and sickness, and old age, all yet remained to have their influence in forming those sentiments which shed their ennobling power upon his nature, before leaving a work which he had so generously struggled to improve.*

* *Vaughan*, i. 246, 247.

CHAPTER II.

Origin of the order of Mendicants,—their settlement in England,—their degeneracy,—their quarrel with the university of Oxford.—Wycliffe espouses the cause of that seminary with talents and energy.—An account of the works he published on the subject.—Result of the controversy.—His preferment in the church and university —His quarrel with the Pope.

ABOUT three years after the publication of "The Last Age of the Church," Wycliffe engaged in a discussion of a more useful and important nature than that which his first work had embraced. I allude to his celebrated controversy with the Dominican or Mendicant Friars; of which we now proceed to give an account.

These begging fraternities had been instituted considerably more than a century before the date to which our narrative re-

fers, and had now become general throughout Europe. A branch of them had been established at Oxford so early as the year 1221. The motives for which, on the part of the Pope by whom they were founded, this order of coenobites had their origin, were highly laudable and honourable. It was, that by their voluntary poverty and disinterested attachment to the cause of the gospel, they might form a contrast and afford a lesson to the other monastic orders, the members of which, wallowing in wealth, and indulging in luxurious indulgence, if not in lewdness and debauchery, seemed to have forgotten the holy purpose for which their order had been instituted. And for some time the Mendicant Friars fully realized the views to which they owed their origin. Despising wealth, and clad in miserable garb, and without the comfort of shoes to their feet, they traversed sea and land, preaching repentance towards God, and faith, towards our Lord Jesus Christ. They devoted themselves also to such literary pursuits as were then prosecuted. The popes, indeed, among other

immunities, had granted them the liberty of the education of youth, for which their learning so well fitted them ; a privilege of which they did not fail to avail themselves ; and from these circumstances, as well as from the liberal and expansive views which travel could not fail to impart to them, they soon incomparably surpassed every monastic order in learning, in respectability and influence, and attained to a degree of honour and distinction to which their rivals were complete strangers. “ The Mendicants,” says Mosheim, “ were at the head of the monastic orders, and had indeed become the heads of the church : so extensive was the influence they had acquired that all matters of importance, both in the court of Rome, and in the cabinets of princes, were carried on under their supreme and absolute direction. The multitude had such a high notion of these *sturdy beggars*, and of their credit with the Supreme Being, that great numbers of both sexes, some in health, others in a state of infirmity, others at the point of death, earnestly desired to be admitted into the Mendicant order,

which they looked upon as a sure and infallible method of rendering Heaven propitious. Many made it an essential part of their last wills, that their body after death, should be wrapped in ragged Dominican or Franciscan* habits, and interred among the Mendicants; for, amidst the barbarous superstition, and wretched ignorance of the age, the generality of people believed that they might readily obtain mercy from Christ at the day of judgment, if they should appear before his tribunal associated, with the Mendicant Friars."†

But these golden days were not always to last. The admiration and deference which were everywhere shown to them perverted the judgment of the Mendicants, and exercised the most baleful effect on their character in every respect. They became proud, and arrogant, and corrupt.

* The Mendicants were divided into four orders,—the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Carmelites, and the Augustines, of which, the two first were the most celebrated and powerful.

† *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii. pp. 294. Lon. 1826. 8vo.

They presumptuously boasted of themselves as the peculiar favourites of Heaven, and as alone commissioned to reveal to mankind the true method of salvation. They also became as fond of wealth, and as engrossed with the debasing love of it, as the other orders against whom they inveighed so loudly. But their arrogant intermeddling with the discipline and privileges of the university with which he was connected, was the immediate cause of Wycliffe's entering into controversy with them. For a century they had been expressing dissatisfaction with several of the statutes of that seminary, particularly with the one by which it was enacted, "That nobody should obtain the degree of doctor in divinity, unless he had before been a regent of arts, either in that or some other university." Another ordinance, which gave them great uneasiness, was that which prescribed to all students a certain form of scholastic exercises. Laying claim, as they did, to unrivalled dignity, if not to absolute perfection, they could not brook any regulation of which they were not themselves the authors.

They, moreover, complained of the ordinances in question as affecting them most unjustly, and as most offensive to them. The fact is, their pride was wounded; for, though probably the former of the statutes complained of might really have been unfavourable to them, inasmuch as they entered the order of friars when young, and had not an opportunity of attending college so early as others; yet as to the latter ordinance, they excepted against it, merely because they thought themselves too accomplished, and too important to be tied down by the common trammels of college discipline. They accordingly used every means to be exempted from the operation of these rules, or to have the rules themselves annulled. For this purpose they appealed to the Pope; they petitioned the king; they consulted the chancellor, and the other members of the university, and stirred up the students to be seditious and disobedient. Nor was this all. They tried every expedient to withdraw the younger students from the university into their convents; and in this insidious practice, they

so far succeeded that parents became afraid to send their children to Oxford, lest they should be kidnapped by the friars; and thus the number of students is said to have declined from thirty thousand to about the fifth part of that number. To counteract this, the university passed a statute to this effect, that no youths should be received by those mendicants into their order, till they had attained the age of eighteen. But this statute seems not to have had the effect which its framers expected and desired; for the institutions of the Dominicans, favoured by the Pope, and fortified to a great degree by the prejudices of the people, continued to prosper, notwithstanding all the attempts, however judicious, of the university to the contrary.

Against the corruptions of this obnoxious order, many able men had lifted their testimony before this time, particularly Richard Fitzralf, archbishop of Armagh, who did not hesitate to prefer his complaints against them even in the presence of his Holiness. "As I came to-day," says he, "out of my hostile, who should I meet in this far land,

but an honest English gentleman, a singular good friend of mine; and, having inquired the cause of his resorting hither, the poor man with tears told me that his son, a promising youth, studying at Oxford, had been cogg'd away by these devilish friars; and though he had tried every way to get him back, all had failed, so that he was at last forced to come in person to Avignon, to sue for his release from the court of Rome, then there."* But the archbishop was not destined to live till he saw the result of the controversy in which he had engaged. He died in 1360; and his death was viewed by his opponents as the complete triumph of their cause. They were not aware that the sword of controversy was to pass into other hands; and that the year of his death was to be that in which Wycliffe, a person more highly gifted and more intrepid than his predecessor in this theological warfare, was to espouse the cause which that prelate had so auspiciously begun. Our Reformer, indeed, entered on

* Tytler's *Life of John Wickliff*, p. 26.

the discussion of this question with all the energy and zeal for which his character is so remarkable: And this he did, not merely on account of the encroachments attempted by the friars on the privileges of the university, but also in consequence of the religious errors by which they were characterized. He attacked these obnoxious mendicants both in oral discourse, and in various elaborate compositions; the latter of which have been handed down to the present day. They all, however, remain in manuscript, with the exception of one "Against the Orders of the Begging Friars."* The others are entitled, "Of the Poverty of Christ;" "Against Able Beggary;" and "Idleness in Begging."

Of the grounds which Wycliffe employed, a specimen or two may not be unacceptable to the reader. The following is respecting the practice of kidnapping youths into their institutions:

"Friars draw children from Christ's re-

* Published under the superintendence of Dr. James, at Oxford, in 1606.

ligion into their private order by hypocrisy, falsehood, and stealing. For they tell that their order is more holy than any other, and that they should have a higher degree in the bliss of heaven than other men that have not been therein, and that men of their order should never go to hell, but should judge other men with Christ at doomsday. And so they steal children from father and mother, * * * and thus are cursed of God as the Pharisees were of Christ, to whom he saith, 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves.' And seeing he that stealeth an ox or a cow is damnable by God's law, and man's law also, much more he that stealeth a man's child that is better than all earthly goods, and draweth him to the less perfect order."

The next quotation contains an answer to the arguments advanced by the friars, that our Saviour and his disciples were beggars, and that the order which our Re-

former was attacking, had the sanction of such unquestionable authority for the practice he was denouncing.

“ Christ lived on alms of Mary Magdalene, and other holy men and women, without asking or constraining. Christ instructed his apostles and disciples not to take with them a satchel or scrip, as the friars did, to carry to their convents what they obtained by begging, but to find out what man is able to hear the gospel, and to eat and drink with him, and to pass not hence, or go from house to house. St Paul laboured with his own hands, for himself and for those that were with him, and coveted neither gold, nor silver, nor clothes of men, to give other teachers an example, so that they might do the same in time of need. The same apostle declares that those who will live in idleness and indolence, and who will not labour, should not eat. St. Clement ordained that Christians should not beg openly; and in order to put an end to this begging, St. Austin composed two works, showing how

monks ought to labour with their own hands for their livelihood." From all these arguments our Reformer concludes "since open beggary is thus sharply condemned in holy writ, it is a foul error to maintain it, but that it is a grosser error to say that Christ was a beggar, since, in that case, he must have been contrary to his own law."

* * "It is forsaking the commandment of Christ which inculcates the duty of giving alms to the feeble, the crooked, the blind, and the bedrid, to give alms to hypocrites that feign themselves holy and needy, when they are strong in body, and have a superabundance of riches, both in great vast houses, and precious clothes, and great feasts, and many jewels and treasure. Poor men are destroyed by this false begging, since the friars take falsely from them their worldly goods, by which they should sustain their bodily life, and deceive rich men in their alms, and encourage them to live in falseness against Jesus Christ. For since there were poor men enough to take men's alms before the

friars came in, and the earth is now more barren than it was then, the poor must now want."*

Several other heresies which the mendicants entertained, Wycliffe exposed with his characteristic energy and talents. One of these heresies, as one of the foregoing extracts may have shown, was the doctrine of man's perfection in this world, and of his being able to live perfectly untainted by sin; and though such an opinion is completely at variance with every idea of Christianity, which even the most lax thinker can form, yet these friars not only entertained it, but insisted that they themselves had attained to such perfection, and that it was attainable only by those who should enter into their order.

Such, says Mr. Tytler, are the points of accusation and of controversy which Wycliffe, espousing the cause of the university against its enemies and revilers, brought forward both in speech and writing, with an eloquence and strength of reason not

* Lewis, 7, 8, 9.

equalled before his time. He used also in this controversy his own maternal tongue, and not the then monastic jargon of the Latin ; so that what he wrote or spoke was addressed, not to learned clerks only, but to the generality of the gentry and people of the land ; and thus it came to have much more force and weight. But these zealous struggles on the part of Wycliffe to expose error, and to promote truth, were not ultimately so successful as the reader may have been led to suppose. Truth makes its way by slow degrees, and is often kept down for ages by prejudice, delusion, or ignorance. But it is some consolation to know that every discussion, however ineffectual at the time, accelerates its triumph, and is therefore to be regarded with favour and praise. The controversy before us was carried before Parliament ; and though the cause, so ably espoused by Wycliffe, met with the support of that court, inasmuch as it confirmed that decree of the university, by which it had been enacted that the Mendicants should receive no person into their order under the age

of eighteen, yet, on appeal to the pope, on whose favour they relied, these mendicants procured a dispensation from that other statute of the university which required persons to be regents in arts before they obtained the degree of doctor in divinity. It has, with justice, been supposed that our reformer in person advocated in parliament the cause of the university, of which he had been the great champion; and that from this time, [1366,] his merits became known to the court, as they had already been to the patrons of the seminary in question, as well as to the public at large. At this period, also, he gained the friendship and patronage of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, of whom we shall afterwards have occasion to speak.

Before this date, indeed, though he undoubtedly looked higher than to mere worldly remuneration, his merits had not been entirely overlooked or unrewarded. In the year 1361, he had been elevated by the university to be master of Baliol College; about the same time he had been presented to the rectory of Fillingham in

the diocese of Lincoln, which he afterwards exchanged for that of Luggershall in Wiltshire; and four years afterwards we find him raised to the wardenship of Canterbury Hall; appointments equally honourable to himself, and to the discrimination and liberality of the persons by whom they were respectively conferred. From this last appointment, resulted proceedings so important that a particular account of it must be laid before the reader.

In the year 1361, Simon de Islep, archbishop of Canterbury, supposed to have been a fellow-student of Wycliffe's at Merton College, struck with the decay of learning at Oxford, founded Canterbury Hall; a seminary designed for the maintenance of eleven scholars and a warden,—of whom eight were to be seculars, the remaining three and the warden, monks of Canterbury. These appointments were accordingly made, but the warden, behaving himself like a low partizan and intriguer, was thrown out of the establishment; and Islep, altering his original intention, resolved to constitute

the wardenship into an office for a secular.* Under such circumstances, Wycliffe was, in 1365, appointed to fill the vacant office, in consequence of "the honesty of his life, his laudable conversation, and his knowledge of letters," and because the founder reposed the utmost reliance "on his fidelity, circumspection, and industry." But this appointment Wycliffe was not destined long to enjoy. Islep soon after died; and Simon de Langham, a benedictine monk, a person of an opposite character, succeeded him. On the elevation of this prelate, means were used to induce him to eject our reformer from the wardenship. This step, so congenial to his own mind, he was persuaded immediately to take; but against it Wycliffe appealed to the Pope; a proof that, at this date, he was still a faithful subject of that unrighteous sovereignty, of which he afterwards became so bold an opponent. The circumstance of his having made this appeal affords also a proof of conscious integrity: because he

* The three monks were, at the same time, ejected from their office; and no regulars were again admitted.

must have been aware that the papal court was blindly partial both to monks and mendicants. This integrity, or to speak more correctly, this intrepidity is farther and more strikingly evident from the fact that, while his cause was still pending, he not only continued to resist the mendicants, but he fearlessly ventured to oppose the claims of the Roman court itself. Of the nature of this resistance, which inflamed his holiness against him, and affected the decision of the question at issue, the following brief narrative will afford a sufficient illustration.

King John, deserted by all the brave and the good, and when threatened with a foreign war, had, in the year 1213, been induced pusillanimously to court the favour and the assistance of the Roman senate. To secure this object, he had resigned his kingdoms of England and Ireland into the hands of the Pope, and submitted to do homage to his holiness, and to hold them of him as a vassal for the payment of a thousand merks yearly. That monarch survived this dishonourable submission but

two years: his son, Henry III. however, continued it; but how this claim was resisted during the succeeding reigns, or if resisted at all, is not well known. Nor is it now a point of much consequence. It was, however, now renewed by Pope Urban; and King Edward III. was informed that in default of payment, he would be summoned to appear, and to answer for such conduct in the court of the sovereign pontiff, who thus laid claim to be his civil as well as religious superior. In truth, Urban not only renewed this demand, but he insisted that thirty years' arrears were due. Edward was a character the very opposite of that weak monarch, who first made the odious acknowledgment in question. Accordingly, instead of acquiescing, he immediately laid the pope's letter before parliament; and this court, much to their honour, declared, that "as neither King John nor any other king could bring his realm and kingdom into such thralldom and subjection, but by common assent of parliament, which he had not done: therefore that which he did, was

against his oath at his coronation ; besides many other causes. If, therefore, the Pope shall attempt any thing against the king by process or otherwise, the king, with all his subjects, should, with all their force and power, resist the same." But this threat, bold and honourable as it was, did not entirely settle the question. Urban procured one of the most learned of his monks to publish a defence of his claim : this was done in a treatise which obtained great reputation, and in which the author insisted that, as England had once been delivered up to the Pope, she could not again, without the consent of His Holiness, withdraw from that connexion. The writer, flattering himself that his arguments were irrefragable, and his conclusions firmly established, challenged Wycliffe, who had now become the most able and eminent ecclesiastic in England, to show the fallacy of his reasoning or the unsoundness of his views.

At this crisis, says Mr. Tytler, Wycliffe came forward, and, taking up this dreaded book, so ably handled the controversy—

replied to its propositions with such strength of reason—and with the weapons of honest truth and clear common sense, so buffeted the poor monk, that, with all his armour of artificial logic, and his meshes of sophistry, he could not save himself, but was forced to beat a speedy retreat, followed by his troops of discomfited syllogisms: to so utter a rout did Wycliffe put these vain and intolerable barbarisms, so thickly sown in the logical and theological treatises of this age.*

As Wycliffe had been challenged, so, in his turn, he challenges his opponent to renew the discussion, and satisfactorily to refute his arguments; but adds, “if I am not mistaken, he will never be able to make out his point, before that day in which all exactions shall be at an end.” Notwithstanding, however, the boldness which he thus displayed in resisting the claims of the sovereign pontiff, he still professed his

* The title of Wycliffe's work is *Determinatio de Domino*, Vaughan's *Life*, i. 268–275. The author styles himself the king's peculiar clerk or chaplain; a proof of the eminence to which he had attained.

allegiance to that power, and designated himself, "as a humble and obedient son of the Roman church;" and he affirms that he will assert nothing that may sound injurious to the same church, or reasonably offend devout ears. He had not, therefore, himself withdrawn from this unscriptural hierarchy; nor can he be said ever to have withdrawn; but this, and every discussion in which he engaged, contributed by degrees to relax the chains, in regard to the Roman church, by which the human mind was bound, and to restore it to liberty.

From the freedom with which he resisted the claims of the Court of Rome, it was not difficult to foresee how his appeal respecting the wardenship of Canterbury Hall would be disposed of: the Pope, finding himself rudely attacked by one who was a litigant in his court, did not hesitate to sacrifice his justice to his resentment; he condemned Wycliffe, and reinstated the former warden; a decision which probably led him to examine more narrowly that unscriptural dominion of whose tyranny he now found himself the victim.

CHAPTER III.

Wycliffe chosen Professor of Divinity.—How the science of Divinity had been previously taught.—How it was taught by our Reformer.—His Lectures characterized.—The independence and prerogatives of the Anglican Church encroached upon by the Pope.—Wycliffe one of the Royal Commissioners to treat on this subject.—Result of his Embassy.—His Preferments.—The mode in which he performed his duties as a Parish Minister.

IN the preceding chapter, it was mentioned, that Wycliffe was deprived by the Pope of the wardenship of Canterbury Hall. He could have cherished no hope of its ever being restored to him; but talents and a character such as his, will never long be allowed to lie dormant, or rather they create channels for themselves through which their influence may be extended. Our Reformer, being deprived of

the office in question, was soon after elected Professor of Divinity by the Chancellor and regents of the university. This took place in 1372; previously to which time, he had taken the degree of Doctor of Divinity; an honour much less frequently obtained in the fourteenth century, and of consequence more highly valued, than in modern times.

Wycliffe was thus placed on an eminence from which his light could shine forth to the blind multitudes that surrounded him. He was now a public teacher of theology, the most vitally important of all sciences, which had long been his study, and in the knowledge of which he had then no rivals. He found it, however; not only in a backward state, but become nearly useless and unintelligible, on account of the scholastic jargon with which it was encumbered. By the introduction of this jargon, says Mr. Baber, philosophical abstraction and subtilty had superseded that unaffected simplicity and engaging plainness, with which the primitive teachers of Christianity explained the doctrines of salvation. The

schoolmen, by pursuing with zeal and pertinacity, unprofitable or absurd inquiries and endless cavils, had almost extinguished the spirit of piety towards God, as well as that of peace towards each other. They substituted, for spiritual truths, a superstitious credulity which benumbed the mind, and tended rather to encourage immorality, than to check it. The traditions of men, false miracles, and legendary tales, which were as destitute of truth, as they were repugnant to reason, were continually introduced to confirm or illustrate their assertions,—and all this principally with a view to support the mummery of a corrupted church, or to advance the interests of the monastic orders.

Under such unfavourable circumstances did Wycliffe find the science of divinity, as it was then taught, either from the pulpit or in colleges. His learning, his comparative freedom from prejudice, and his piety, enabled him to discover the degradation to which this noble science had been reduced, and inspired him, under divine grace, with an ardent desire to effect its restoration to

its original, and now undisputed dignity. He had no reverence for long established doctrines or customs, unless they were inculcated in Scripture; and on becoming a public teacher of theology, he seems to have resolved, with the divine blessing, to make the Bible, and the Bible alone, the standard and the source of his opinions. Having now, in short, become convinced, to use the words of Mr. Tytler, of the corruptions of the Roman hierarchy; having from his youth, up to the time when his mind had grown to the full strength of manhood, perused the holy Scriptures, with an earnest desire to discover the truth; and sincere prayers that God's grace would illuminate his mind in the search, he came to the resolution of devoting all his faculties to the overturning that spiritual tyranny under which so many millions of mankind had groaned for more than a thousand years. Thus, while he resolved, on the one hand, to inculcate practical and evangelical religion, as revealed in the Bible, he determined, on the other, to expose the corruptions and heresies of the Romish

Church. "God's will," says he, "is plainly revealed in the two Testaments, which may be called Christ's church, which a Christian well understanding, may thence gather sufficient knowledge during his pilgrimage here on earth. All truth is contained in Scripture; so that what disputation soever is not originally thence to be deduced, must be accounted profane. We ought to admit of no science, no conclusion that is not approved by the Scripture; no law, unless it be either subordinate to this law, or help to bring us into it; no court besides the court of heaven; and no parson, not excepting even the Pope's Holiness, daring to dispense with holy Scripture, ought to be any longer accounted a Christian; nay, though we had a hundred Popes, and all the friars in the world were turned into cardinals, yet ought we to trust more to the law of the gospel, than all this multitude."*

Such were the orthodox opinions of Wycliffe relative to the sacred volume.

* Tytler's Life of Wickliffe, 53, 54.

On this subject, and on many others connected with it, other extracts, equally unequivocal and striking, might be given; but it is scarcely necessary; we shall, as we proceed, have various opportunities of alluding to the doctrines and views on which, as a professor of divinity, he seems to have insisted, and which are expounded in his written works. Suffice it at present to say, that the doctrines which have been in general regarded as forming the most important peculiarities of the Christian revelation, were evidently the favourite portion of his creed. Thus we find him zealously inculcating in the most evangelical spirit, the doctrine of the fall of man, and the consequent depravity of human nature; the excellence and perpetual obligation of the moral law; the exclusive dependence of every child of Adam on the atonement of Christ for the remission of his sins; and the aids of divine grace, for victory over temptation, and for the possession of holiness. "Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," says he, "is all-sufficient for salvation, and that without that faith, it is impossible for

any man to please God; that the merit of Christ is able by itself to redeem all mankind from hell; that this sufficiency is to be understood without any other cause concurring; and that therefore men ought, for their salvation, to trust wholly to Christ, not to seek to be justified by any other way than by his death and passion, nor to be righteous by any other method than a participation of his all-perfect righteousness." * * " We all are originally sinners as Adam and in Adam; his leprosy cleaving faster to us, than Naaman's did to Gehazai; so that even the infant, before it has seen the light of the world, has this blemish inherent in its unborn members. Of ourselves we are unable so much as to think a good thought, unless Jesus, the angel of great council, send it. We cannot perform a good work, unless it be his work; it is his mercy that first goes before us, and gives us grace, like as it is the same mercy which follows after us and keeps us in the same grace." * * " It is not good for us to trust in our merits, in

our virtues or our righteousness ; but only in God's free pardon, as given us through faith in Jesus Christ."

It appears also that these momentous tenets, in which he so unequivocally believed, were very far from being regarded by him with the coolness of mere speculation. On the contrary, they are found united in him with that peculiar feeling of gratitude and humility, that hallowed confidence in God, and those refined pleasures of devotion, which they so directly tend to produce. With him, to use his own nervous language, the love of God was an exercise of the soul, " full of reason."* He laboured not to be " conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he might prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." He appears, in short, to have endeavoured, under providence, to have such a walk and conversation, that, while he was instructing others in divine things, he might not himself be a castaway.

* *Vaughan*, i. 313.

But while his lectures were thus devotional and doctrinal, they contained also a considerable portion of those ecclesiastical discussions which then, for the first time in England, rent the church and shook popery to the very foundation. He renewed his attacks on the Friars Mendicant. He exposed some of the most glaring errors of the church of Rome, as well as the licentious and corrupt lives of the clergy. He did not even spare his Supreme Holiness; whom he hesitated not to denominate Antichrist; and he wrested from him that divine attribute of infallibility which he had so arrogantly assumed. "God forbid," says he, "that the church, or that any man should think that the faith of other members of the church doth depend upon this Peter, that John, or that Gregory; yea, it may so happen that our Lord the Pope may be ignorant of the laws of Scripture, and that the church of England may be far better and quicker-sighted in finding out the catholic truth, than all this Roman church of pope and cardinals being all thrust together." "No man,"

to quote other words of his referring to the same subject, "no man is to be credited for his mere authority's sake, unless he can show Scripture for the maintenance of his opinion." The truth is, as previously stated, he made the Bible the standard of his faith and principles; that book which not only had been hitherto unknown to the people, but with which the clergy themselves had been, and still were, but imperfectly acquainted.

A course of lectures, characterized as we have shown Wycliffe's to have been, by great talents and zeal, and embracing discussions of a kind so momentous and novel, could not fail to attract attention and stimulate curiosity. This was the case in an eminent degree with the lectures of which we have been treating. They were attended by a vast concourse of students; they were celebrated far beyond the pale of the university; and the impression which they were meant and were so well calculated to convey, was gradually felt and acknowledged both by the more judicious and unprejudiced portion of his hearers, and by

others to whom the substance of them had been communicated. He did not at first venture very decidedly or very emphatically to attack the heresies and corruptions of the Roman church ; but being encouraged by the favourable reception given by his hearers to such discussions, or rather, seeing more clearly the monstrous nature of that hierarchy, he at length, with uncompromising boldness, disclosed what he regarded as the whole counsel of God, tore aside the veil from that abominable idol which the whole Christian world had been ignorantly worshipping, and exposed it in all its native hideousness and deformity.

In the meantime, while he was thus boldly and zealously discharging his high duties as professor of divinity, and propagating doctrines so completely subversive of those of the Roman church, he was called upon by his sovereign to occupy a station, the very circumstance of his appointment to which, affords a striking proof of the eminence to which he had attained, and of the high estimation in which he was held. In 1374, he was nominated as one

of seven who formed an embassy to the Pope relative to the independence and prerogatives of the Anglican Church. Gregory, who then filled the chair of St. Peter, laid claim to the right of patronage of vacant benefices in that kingdom; and so far had he or his predecessors carried this unfounded claim, that the richest livings in England had been conferred, not only on foreigners, but on mere children; on persons as ignorant of our language as incompetent to discharge the duties of the office to which they were appointed. In their stead, some unlearned priest, for a miserable pittance, was commissioned to feed their respective flocks; not with the word of truth, communicated in a language which they understood, but with Latin homilies and monkish fables. Thus was the service of God neglected; the immortal souls of men were put in peril; and the ministry of the word, instead of being the saviour of life unto life, was too likely to become the saviour of death unto death. Meanwhile, however, care was taken that the revenues of these benefices should be regularly trans-

mitted to Rome, whither a great portion of the wealth of the country was sent for the support of popish extravagance and corruption. The extent to which this evil was carried is scarcely credible. We learn from Matthew Paris, that, in 1244, the income of these foreign ecclesiastics excelled that of the crown by no less a sum than 10,000 marks; and at another period, it is stated, that the revenue of these aliens amounted to 70,000 marks, while the king's income was not a third of that sum. The parliament of England was now comparatively an enlightened body, and had begun to show pretty correct notions relative both to civil and ecclesiastical liberty. This court, accordingly, had not only made grievous complaints to the king on the subject, but had ventured to make representations respecting it even to the Pope himself. The evil, in truth, had become altogether insupportable, and vigorous steps required to be taken. Edward III. to put an end to it, in deference to the urgent application of his parliament, and to the murmurs of his subjects, and to save the pro-

perty of the realm, despatched, in 1373, commissioners to the Pope, stating the grievous oppression which his conduct had brought on the English nation. Though his holiness promised some partial concessions, yet the object of this mission was not gained. In consequence of this failure, the feelings of the English parliament and people became more exasperated, if possible, than before. Commissioners were immediately sent throughout the whole realm, to make an estimate of all the ecclesiastical benefices and dignities then in the hands of foreigners; and the number was discovered to be so excessive, that it was resolved that another embassy should, without loss of time, be despatched to the Pope. Wycliffe had, ere this, it has been supposed, espoused the cause of the remonstrants on this occasion, and had supported it with all the zeal and learning by which he was so eminently distinguished. Owing to this circumstance, and to the integrity, firmness, and liberality of his general character, he was nominated a member of this embassy. "It was doubtless," says Mr. Vaughan,

“ a conviction that Wycliffe had rendered them material aid in this important contest, that led parliament to assign him a place among the persons so named.” But the negotiation, with which our Reformer’s name was now connected, was not to be conducted at Avignon, then the papal residence. And, if any credit may be attached to the statements of numerous contemporary and Catholic writers, it was in general thought politic, during the middle ages, to prevent the more enlightened portion of mankind from too nearly observing the manners which commonly pervaded the nearest dependants on the successors of St. Peter. Wycliffe had already learned to trace the corruptions of the members of the church to those of the head ; but his inspection of the fountain had been necessarily more distant than that of the streams ; and for this reason we may almost regret that the meeting of the delegates was arranged to take place at Bruges, and not at Avignon.

But the embassy, with which Wycliffe was connected, terminated not more favourably to the English nation than the former.

The truth is, that two clergymen, who were conjoined with our Reformer in this mission, were more anxious to accomplish their own advancement than solicitous for the independence of the Anglican church, or for the welfare of their native country. These men, therefore, did all in their power to thwart the efforts of Wycliffe and his other colleagues; and, on their return, they experienced, from the favour of the Pope, that preferment at which, by their unmanly obsequiousness to him, they had aimed. By this embassy, as was just stated, little or nothing was gained. There was, in truth, no surrender of pontifical claims. The reservation of benefices, and some other obnoxious customs, were, indeed, relinquished; and, on the part of the English monarch, some slight concessions were agreed to. But this treaty was made only to be broken. The Pope, as has been well observed, had no intention of parting so easily with what he conceived one of the richest jewels in his crown, but wished merely by fair words to amuse the ambassadors and get rid of them for the present.

He accordingly showed no respect to the treaty of Bruges; and all the corruptions and oppressions complained of continued to abound as virulently as ever.

Though the object of this negotiation was not gained, yet it was productive of much good, inasmuch as it opened the eyes of Wycliffe to the real character of the sovereign pontiff of the church of Rome. Before this time, his opinions on this subject were not so decided nor so correct, as after he had had an opportunity, by a more enlarged observation, of seeing the real state of the Catholic religion. He now became more emboldened to preach true and undefiled religion, and to expose the Pope as "Antichrist, the worldly priest of Rome, the most cursed of clippers and purse-carvers." Such was the discovery which the embassy enabled him to make of papal corruption and duplicity, that his rebukes, which had hitherto been but remotely applied to the head of the church, were henceforth directed to that quarter with unsparing severity. The Pope, indeed, instead of being regarded as a patron or promoter

of virtue and piety, was looked upon by him as having the directly opposite effect. The covetousness and the secular ambition which had so long and so successfully claimed the reputation of a zeal for piety, were now completely stripped of their disguise, and were seen in their native loathsome colours. Before this time, indeed, in the solitude of his college, and guided only by his Bible, and the light of his own clear and strong intellect; he had speculated and reasoned upon the privileges so loudly claimed by the persons who had arrogantly styled themselves the vicegerents of Christ: He had inclined to dispute their authority, and had heard much of their profligate and sinful lives. But now he was for a season residing within the very tabernacles of sin: He was in the midst of a thick darkness, which, like that brought upon Egypt by Moses, could be handled: He felt and touched the wickedness of which he had only dreamt before: He observed the effects of the system of Romish superstition in destroying the faith and purity of the Gospel, in paralysing the conscience, depraving the

heart, rendering the intellect dead and sluggish in her researches after truth, chaining the free-born reason of man, and giving for money a chartered indulgence to the most horrid sins and licentiousness. He came home, therefore, in a paroxysm of holy rage and indignation, and all his best principles and feelings,—his religion, his love to his country, his generous shame for the time already lost, his indignation at being baffled in his negotiations by the servile and selfish tools of the Papacy,—impelled him again to enter the lists, to put on the whole armour of God, and to overlook every selfish or worldly consideration in declaring the truth, and the whole counsel of God.*

During the continuance of these negotiations, which lasted for two years, our Reformer was not forgotten at home. His merit had been before known to the king; and his services (however unsuccessful,) as one of the royal commissioners at Bruges, had given him new claims on the kindness of his sovereign. Accordingly, before his

* Tytler's *Life of Wickliffe*, 77, 78.

return from the continent, he was presented by the king to the prebend of Auste, in the diocese of Worcester. About the same period, the rectory of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, becoming vacant, was also bestowed, by royal favour, on Wycliffe.

At this period liberal opinions, on ecclesiastical subjects, as is evident from the preceding narrative, were begun to be entertained by the king and parliament of England. To the existence indeed of these opinions Wycliffe owed the preferments which were so liberally conferred on him. The Duke of Lancaster, second son of the king, and who, first from the sickness and afterwards from the death of his older brother, was associated with his aged father in the administration of the government, was the zealous friend and patron of our Reformer. And so great was the respect which Wycliffe's character had secured to him, that, as we shall afterwards have occasion to state more fully, the parliament of the king, soon after this time, referred a most important question to his judgment.

Under such favourable circumstances it

was, that in 1376, he returned to England and entered on the discharge of his clerical and professorial duties. Greater deference would now, we may reasonably suppose, be paid to his opinions than at any former period ; and he would possess proportionally greater influence over the minds and sentiments of his countrymen. Nor did he fail to avail himself of the advantages he enjoyed. He devoted himself more exclusively and zealously than ever to the great work of reformation, which, under divine assistance, had hitherto so eminently prospered with him. He was willing to spend and be spent in the cause of truth. He looked upon all things as loss and very vanity, when compared to the cause of Christ and of his church. To promote this cause he inveighed, as previously hinted, more severely than at any former period against the Roman hierarchy, against the person who was placed at the head of it, against its priests, its institutions, its corruptions, its doctrines. He lifted his voice against it, and uttered his denunciations so loud and so perseveringly, that they were

heard at the utmost corner of the land, and even reached the ears of the sovereign pontiff himself. The fabric against which they were directed shook to its centre, and the priesthood whom it supported in worldly grandeur and inglorious indolence, trembled for the security of that craft by which they had their wealth.

But his whole mind was not devoted to his college duties. He had several livings in the church; and the reader may thus be surprised and vexed to find so good a man, and one whose opinions as to ministerial duty were generally so correct, an eminent pluralist. We should have been happy had this not been the case. He saw and he exposed many corruptions; but no man is perfect; and while we regret that Wycliffe was a pluralist, we must not forget how many abuses he corrected, and how much the cause of truth and the Church of Christ owe to him. But probably the best excuse we can find for this circumstance is the peculiar and unprecedented faithfulness with which, so far as was possible, he performed the duties of both offices. He resided

at Lutterworth, and most zealously performed the duties of a parish minister there, except during the Session of College, when he discharged the functions of professor of divinity. Had he merely been a professor, his usefulness, and the impression which he made on the religious character of the age, would not have been nearly so great. His usefulness as a clergyman, and the example he set his countrymen in that capacity, were truly eminent, and are worthy of particular notice. His example in this respect was the more beneficial, as the most lax and dangerous ideas were cherished, on the part of the Romish clergy in regard to ministerial duties, particularly the nature and tendency of preaching. Preaching, in truth, had nearly fallen into disuse: the parochial clergy limited their pulpit duties to the prescribed repetition from the mass book: they were totally ignorant of the Bible, almost even of its name; and if they ever did attempt to preach, their discourses consisted of fables, histories of popish saints, and stories taken from profane history, or handed down by tradition. "They studied foolish questions,

and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law," though, as St. Paul says, "these things are unprofitable and vain!" Wycliffe describes the priests as spending their time in taverns, in hunting and gambling, instead of learning God's law, or in preaching it. A very striking instance of the neglect of preaching, or their inability to perform that duty, on the part even of the popish prelates, occurred in Scotland nearly two centuries after the date of which we are now speaking. Dunbar, Archbishop of Glasgow, went to Ayr to oppose the celebrated George Wishart, who was labouring in that quarter in propagating and enforcing the reformed doctrines. The pulpit, which Wishart meant to occupy, was taken possession of by the Archbishop, who, we are told "preached to his jackmen, and to sum anld boisses of the town. The soum of all his sermon was, *They say we should preiche, quhy not? Better leit thryve, nor nevir thryve: Keep us still for your Bischope, and we shall provide better the next time.* This was the beginning, and end of the Bishope's sermons, who with

haste departed the town, but returned not to fulfil his promises."* This irreverent and disgraceful behaviour requires no comment. If such was the repulsive exhibition of a dignitary of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century, we can hardly form too low an opinion of the degraded state of that church at the time to which our narrative refers.

It is consolatory to turn our view from this shocking picture to the bright example of Wycliffe. His views on the subject of preaching were sound and enlarged, and resulted from a pious and devout heart. Of all the clerical duties, he says, "most of all is the preaching of the gospel; for this Christ enjoined on his disciples more than any other; by this he conquered the world out of the fiend's hand; and whosoever he be that can but bring priests to act thus, hath authority from God, and merit in his deed. The highest service that men may attain to on earth is to preach the word of

* *Knox's History of the Reformation of the Church of Scotland*, 44, 45.

God. This service falls peculiarly to priests; and therefore God more directly demands it of them. Hereby should they produce children to God,—and that is the end for which God has wedded the church, and for this cause Jesus Christ occupied himself most in preaching, and thus did his apostles,—and for this, God loved them. Christ, when he ascended into heaven, commanded it especially to all his apostles, to preach the Gospel freely to every man. So also, when he spoke last to Peter, he bade him thrice, as he loved him, to feed his sheep; and this would not a wise shepherd have done, had he not himself loved it well. In this, stand the office of the spiritual shepherd. Since Christ and John and all the prophets were compelled to come out of the desert to preach to the people and to leave their solitary prayers, how dare these pretending heretics say it is better to be still, and to pray over their own feigned ordinances, than to preach the Gospel of Christ? What cursed spirit of falsehood moveth priests to close themselves within stone walls for all their life, since Christ com-

manded all his apostles and priests to go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel? Certainly they are open fools, and do plainly against the Gospel; and if they continue in the error, are accursed of God as perilous deceivers and heretics."

Such are the correct and elevated notions of our Reformer on the subject of preaching. They are such as do honour both to his judgment and his piety. And he was himself an example of what he professed and inculcated. He was a most faithful and efficient parish minister, and, through divine grace, and the divine blessing, "he studied to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." He did, indeed, occasionally introduce in the pulpit discussions relative to the corruptions and debasement by which the Romish church and the priests were characterized. Nor were such subjects either uninteresting or unedifying. They tended to open the eyes of the people to the unchristian state to which they were reduced both as to morals and religion, —

and they could not but pave the way, in a considerable degree, for the reception of the doctrines which he taught, and of that reformation at which he aimed. But though such discussions were not unfrequent, his delight was to unfold the peculiar doctrines of the gospel: he seemed determined, indeed, to preach nothing so much as Jesus Christ, and him crucified. On this point, his excellent biographer, Mr. Vaughan has brought forward many striking examples; of which the following is too interesting not to be quoted. The sermon, from which it is taken, was delivered by him on a Christmas day, and the ground of it was that passage in Isaiah, beginning with the words, "Unto us a child is born."

"On this day we may affirm that a child is born to us, since Jesus, according to our belief, was this day born. Both in figure and in letter, God spake of old to this intent, that to us a child should be born, in whom we should have joy. From the speech of Isaiah, three short lessons are to be delivered, that men may rejoice in the

after services of this child. First, we hold it as a part of our faith that, as our first parents had sinned, there must be atonement made for it according to the righteousness of God. For as God is merciful, so is he full of righteousness. But except he keep his righteousness in this point, how may he judge all the world? There is no sin but what is against God, but this sin was done directly against the Lord Almighty and Alrightful. The greater also the Lord is, against whom any sin is done, the greater always is the sin,—just as to refuse the king's bidding is the greatest of offences. But the sin which is done against God's bidding, is greater without measure. God, then, according to our belief, bid Adam not to eat of the apple. Yet he broke God's command: Nor was he to be excused therein by his own weakness, by Eve, nor by the serpent; and hence, according to the righteousness of God, this sin must always be punished. It is to speak lightly to say that God might, of his mere power, forgive this sin without the atonement which was made for it; since the

justice of God would not suffer this, but requires that every trespass be punished either in earth or in hell. God may not accept a person to forgive him his sins, without an atonement, else he must give free license to sin both in angels and men, and then sin were no sin, and our God were no God.

“ Such is the first lesson we take as a part of our faith. The second is, that the person who may make atonement for the sin of our first father, must needs be God and man. For as man's nature trespassed, so must man's nature render atonement. An angel, therefore, would attempt in vain to make atonement for man, for he has not the power to do it ; nor was his the nature that here sinned. For since all men form one person, if any member of this person maketh atonement, the whole person maketh it. But we may see that, if God made a man of nothing, or strictly anew, after the manner of Adam, yet he were bound to God to the extent of his power for himself, having nothing wherewith to make atonement for his own or for Adsm's sin. Since,

then, atonement must be made for the sin of Adam, as we have shown, the person to make the atonement must be God and man; for then the worthiness of this person's deeds were equal to the unworthiness of the sin."

Never was there a more clear exposition of the necessity of an atonement for sin, and that the "Child born," as mentioned in the text, should be God and man in one person. The following extract of a practical nature from the same discourse, is not less striking, or less orthodox.

"This Child was only born *to* the men who follow him in his manner of life, for he was born *against* others. The men who are unjust and proud, and who rebel against God, may read their judgment in the person of Christ. By him they must needs be condemned, and that most certainly, if they continue wicked toward his Spirit to their death. And if we covet sincerely that this child may prove to be born to us, let us rejoice in him, and follow him in these three virtues, in righteousness, meekness, and patience, for our God. For whoever

shall be against Christ and his spirit in these things unto his death, must needs be condemned of this Child, as others must needs be saved. And thus the joy professed in this Child, who was all meekness and full of virtues, should not make men to be children in malice, and then they would well keep this festival. To those who would indulge in strife, I would say, that the Child who is born, is also Prince of Peace, and loveth peace, and contemneth men contrary to peace. Let us reflect, then, how Christ came in the fulness of time, when he should; and how he came in meekness, teaching us this value at his birth; and how he came in patience, continuing even from his birth unto his death; and let us follow him in these things, for the joy we have here in him, and because this joy in the patience of Christ, bringeth to joy that ever shall last."

These extracts cannot but have been consolatory and pleasing to the serious reader. There is yet another that, while on this subject, we cannot resist the temptation of making. It is on the sufferings of

our blessed Saviour as the price of our redemption.

“ Men mark the passion of Christ, and print it on their heart somewhat to follow it. It was the most *voluntary* passion that ever was suffered, and the most *painful*. It was most voluntary, and so most meritorious. Hence, when Christ went to Jerusalem, he foretold the form of his passion to his disciples; and he, who before concealed himself, to come to the city, came now to his suffering in a way, to show his free will. Hence, also, he saith at the supper, ‘ With desire have I coveted to eat of this passover with you.’ The desire of his godhead, and the desire of his manhood, moved him to eat thereof, and afterwards to suffer. But all this was insignificant, and as a token and figure of his last Supper, which he eateth in heaven with the men whom he hath chosen. And since Christ suffered this cheerfully for the sins of his brethren, they should suffer gratefully for their own sins, and should purpose to forsake them. This, indeed, is the cause why God would have the passion

of Christ rehearsed,—the profit of the brethren of Christ, and not his own. But the *pain* of Christ's passion passed all other pains; for he was the most laden of men, and in middle age, and God, by miracle, allowed his mind to suffer; for else by his joy, he might not have known sorrow. In Christ's passion, indeed, were all circumstances that could make his pain great, and so make it the more meritorious. The place was solemn, and the day also, and the hour, the most so, known to Jews or heathen men. And the ingratitude and contempt were most; for men, who should have loved Christ, ordered the foulest death, in return for the deepest kindness. We should also believe that Christ suffered not in any manner, except for some certain reason; for he is both God and man, who made all things in their number, and so would frame his passions to answer to the greatness of man's sin. Let us, then, follow after Christ in his blessed passion; and let us keep ourselves from sin hereafter, and gather a devout mind from him."

To conclude our extracts, the following

short exposition of the doctrine of grace deserves to be quoted.

“We should know that faith is a gift of God, and that it may not be given to men, except it be graciously. Thus, indeed, all the good which we have is of God; and accordingly, when God rewardeth a good work of man, he crowneth his own gift. This, then, is also of grace, even as all things are of grace that men have, according to the will of God. God’s goodness is the first cause, why he confers any good on man; and so it may not be that God doeth good to men, but if he do it, it is done freely by his own grace; and with this understanding, we shall grant that men deserve of God. * * We are under God’s power, and we can do nothing but by the power of God, and woe shall hereafter be to us, if we abuse this power.”

Such is a specimen of the devout and practical sermons which Wycliffe delivered from the pulpit. It appears to have been as his meat and his drink, in every situation of life, to do the will of his heavenly Father, and to win souls unto Christ. In his pulpit discourses, which, like his own life,

breathed nothing but purity and piety, he seldom, it may be remarked, chose a single text, but took a portion of Scripture, so that they had more of the character of lectures, than of sermons. Nearly four hundred have escaped the fury which was so long exerted to destroy every thing that his pen had produced, and have been handed down to us. They remain in manuscript, but they have been carefully read and studied by Mr. Vaughan, and extracts from them very highly enhance his valuable publication. Nor does he seem to have bestowed greater pains or more time on his pulpit discourses than on the discharge of his other clerical duties. He visited the sick; he waited on the dying, and laboured to prepare them for their awful change; he went about from house to house continually doing good. His ministrations were as heartily and as zealously given to the poorest of his flock as to others of a higher rank. The sick, the poor, and the aged were ever the objects of his peculiar regard. He enjoined on others a regular attention to the wants of the poor and afflicted on the Sabbath, after they performed the pub-

lic duties of the sanctuary. "Visit," says he, "those who are sick, or who are in trouble, especially those whom God has made needy by age, or by other sickness, as the feeble, the blind, and the lame who are in poverty. These you shall relieve with your goods after your power and after their need, for thus biddeth the Gospel." Having thus benevolently advised, he must himself have exhibited a bright example of what he inculcated on others. He appears to have been as charitable as he was pious; and by this union, in which he somewhat resembles our blessed Redeemer, he forms, so far as humanity will admit, a perfect model of a Christian pastor. "He was, in short, instant in season and out of season, showing himself a patron of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptedness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that could not be condemned, that he that was of the contrary part might be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of him."*

* Vaughan's *Life of Wycliffe*, ii. 10—36, where this subject is fully discussed.

CHAPTER IV.

The popularity of his lectures on his return from Bruges.—The effects of them on the part of his enemies.—Summoned before his ecclesiastical superior at London.—Consulted on an important point by the English Parliament.—Again summoned at the instance of the Pope.—His sickness and recovery.—Notice of some of his writings.

WYCLIFFE'S opinions, expounded and enforced with equal talent and intrepidity, not only in the pulpit, but also and chiefly in his place as professor of divinity, rapidly spread and became the subject of the conversation and thought of all classes of men; and in spite of ancient prejudices or of ignorance, they seem to have become popular. The members of the university of Oxford appreciated his character, and regarded their seminary as highly ho-

noured in having so great a man in the list of their professors. They did not, indeed, as a body, espouse his sentiments : he was too far before his age to receive that very cordial support and co-operation which would have been so agreeable and so salutary. Yet multitudes of the students, and not a few of the grave and venerable members of the university adopted his creed ; and by their instruction and example contributed to the dissemination of the new doctrines. Many of the nobility and gentry also, entering with interest into the question ; attended his lectures and became converts to his opinions. Nor was this the only effect of his prelections. The report of these things, says one of his biographers, reached into the country, and the hinds and labourers began to hear that a wonderful man was preaching and lecturing at Oxford in their own tongue, (for he had wisely laid aside the Latin language then universally used in our universities ;) so that they were tempted to come and listen ; and if they once came, such was the charm of his plain and familiar eloquence that they were sure

to return, and to bring their neighbours with them. In this way did he preach the Gospel to the poor and ignorant as well as the rich and learned. The doors and windows of the lecture-hall began to be beset by the populace; and though, from the want of education and of printing, it was impossible for him to disseminate his opinions very rapidly or widely; yet here, by the flocking of the people from the country, a kind of substitute was provided for this want; and what had never yet been done by the lazy clergy of the Romish church, was now accomplished: "The Gospel was preached to the poor."

In proportion, however, as the favourers of the new doctrines were gratified by the circumstances now detailed, the blind adherents of the church of Rome, both laymen and clergy, were alarmed and displeased. This feeling they first displayed in attempts to interrupt the prelections of Wycliffe by riot, and by endeavouring to prevent his admirers from assembling to listen to him. The barons and gentry were as ready to defend the person of their ve-

nerated teacher and their own rights, as the opposite party were to insult the one and to make encroachments on the other. They in fact came to the lecture with their banners displayed, and attended by armed followers. This step had the desired effect. Peace was restored. But, as has been remarked, a stranger might have taken this meeting for a hostile body, rather than as an assembly of students met for the peaceful and holy purpose of hearing the Gospel of the Son of God opened and expounded.

But the opposition of his enemies did not terminate here. The Anglican church, headed by Courtney, took up the question. Early in the year 1377, Wycliffe was summoned, at the instance of the Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury, to appear before his ecclesiastical superiors, to answer certain charges as to his alleged heretical doctrines. Nor did he hesitate to obey their order. On the day appointed, he appeared, attended by the Duke of Lancaster and Henry Percy, Earl Marshall of England. The occasion had excited unspeakable interest ; and an immense crowd

both of friends and enemies had assembled about the church of St. Paul's, where the meeting was to take place, to witness the unprecedented sight; the concourse was, indeed, so great, that it was not without difficulty that Wycliffe and his noble friends could force their way into the court. The Bishop of London, when he beheld the accused attended by the two most powerful subjects of the crown, and perceived Percy avail himself of his official authority to make his way through the crowd, was greatly irritated; and a fierce dispute is said to have ensued; of which the following is given by Fuller, the ecclesiastical historian, as the substance.

Bishop Courtney. Lord Percy, if I had known what mastery you would have kept in the church, I would have stopt you from coming hither.

Duke of Lancaster. We shall keep such mastery here, though you say nay.

Lord Percy. (Addressing himself to our Reformer.) Wycliffe, sit down; for you have many things to answer to, and you need to repose yourself on a soft seat.

Bishop Courtney. It is unreasonable that one cited before his Ordinary should sit down during his answer. He must and shall stand.

Duke of Lancaster. Lord Percy's motion for Wycliffe is but reasonable. And as for you, my Lord Bishop, who are grown so proud and arrogant, I shall bring down the pride, not of *you alone*, but of *all the prelacy in England*.

Bishop Courtney. Do your worst, Sir.

Duke of Lancaster. You bear yourself too lofty on account of the rank of your parents, but such descent will be of no avail to you: your parents shall have enough to do to help themselves.

Bishop Courtney. My confidence is not in my parents, nor in any man else, but only in God, in whom I trust, and by whose assistance I will be bold to speak the truth.

Duke of Lancaster. Rather than I will take these words at his hands, I would pluck the Bishop by the hair out of the church.

The quarrel had now attained its climax, these last words of the Duke, though they

were uttered in a low tone of voice, were really overheard by the assembled multitude; most of whom, being attached to their bishop, declared their determination to oppose, even with their lives, any insult offered to him. An extraordinary tumult and confusion arose; the court, which had assembled with much pomp, was forced to break up amidst riot and noise; the parties escaped in the best way they could; and thus the prosecution was suspended for the present.

With this unseemly quarrel we must not associate the character of Wycliffe. He remained perfectly silent, and did not in the least degree identify himself with the violence of his patrons. The rencontre is not honourable to either party; though in the circumstances in which they were placed, there was little reason to expect moderation and candour. But whatever blame may be attached to his friends or his opponents, Wycliffe had no share in it. He stood silent as an accused and persecuted minister of the gospel of peace, not for the purpose of personal or carnal warfare, but

prepared, relying on divine aid, to inculcate and establish those everlasting truths which his Bible had revealed to him. However ardent or violent he sometimes may have been in maintaining his principles, he seems, on the present occasion, to have resolved "to follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."

In the mean time Edward III. had died, and his grandson, Richard II. son to the Black Prince, succeeded him. The first parliament that assembled during the new reign showed a considerable degree of independence, and very just notions respecting the exactions and arrogance of the papal court. Among other things it was gravely discussed, "whether it would not be lawful in a king, in case of necessity, and as the means of the defence of the country, to detain its treasure and to prevent its being conveyed to a foreign power, though the Pope himself should demand the same under pain of his censure, and by virtue of obedience said to be due to him."

This question, the very mention of which shows no small degree of spirit, was found to involve most important considerations; so that there was an absolute necessity that the soundest views should be entertained in regard to it. On such a subject the authority of Wycliffe was now greater than that of any other man in the kingdom; and this question, in the name of the king, was accordingly referred to his judgment. Such reference must have been gratifying to him, inasmuch as it afforded him a renewed opportunity of lifting his pen against the avaricious character of the Roman church, and of instilling into the minds of his countrymen more just opinions both as to their national and ecclesiastical independence. He entered into the consideration of the subject with his usual judgment and energy, trying its merits according to "the principles of the law of Christ," without the least regard to any previous decisions that the Catholic church might have given respecting it. He shows that self-preservation is the duty as well of nations as of individuals; and that, ac-

cordingly, the kingdom was imperiously called upon to retain its treasure for that purpose, in every case where necessity should appear to require it. Besides, he regarded every contribution made to the Pope as strictly an alms; to be with propriety withheld when it could not be afforded, or when his holiness was not in circumstances to need it. The wealth, indeed, of the papal court was known at this time to be excessive, while the embarrassments of England were producing the loudest murmurs. He concludes his reply in the following manner, so characteristic of him. "Christ, the head of the church, whose example should be followed by all Christian priests, lived on the alms of devout women. He hungered, thirsted, was a stranger, and suffered in many ways, not only in his members, but in himself. As the Apostle testifies, he was made poor for your sakes, that ye, through his poverty, might be enriched. * * Accordingly when the church was first endowed, whoever among the clergy were then holders of any temporal possessions, held the same in the form of a perpetual

alms. This is evident from histories and from other writings. Hence St. Bernard, in his second book to Pope Eugenius, declared, in reference to the secular dominion claimed by him in virtue of his office, 'It may indeed be claimed by you in virtue of some other plea, but assuredly by no right or title derived from apostles. For how could an apostle give unto you that which he did not himself possess? That care over the church which he really had, he gave you; but when did he give you any worldly rule or lordship? Observe what he saith; 'Not bearing yourselves as lords over God's heritage, but yielding yourselves as examples to the flock.' And that ye may not think these words spoken in a show of humility, and not in truth, mark the words of our Lord himself in the Gospel: 'The kings of the nations have lordship over them, but it shall not be so with you.' Here lordly dominion is plainly forbidden by the Apostles, and wilt thou venture to usurp the same? If a lord, thine apostleship is lost; if an apostle, thy lordship is no more, for certainly the one or the other must be

relinquished. If both are sought, both shall be lost. Or shouldst thou succeed, then judge thyself to be of that number respecting whom God so justly complains, saying, 'they have reigned, but not through me; they have become princes, but I have not known them.' And if men will keep that which is forbidden, let us hear what is said; 'he who is the greatest amongst you shall be made as the least, and he who is the highest, shall be your minister;' and to illustrate this saying, he set a child in the midst of his disciples. This, then, is the true form and institution of the apostolic calling: lordship and rule are forbidden; ministration and service are commanded.' "

“ From these words of a blessed man whom the whole church hath agreed to honour, it appears that the Pope has no right to possess himself of the goods of the church, as though he were lord of them; but that he is to be, with respect to them, as a minister or servant, and the proctor for the poor. And would to God that the same proud and eager desire of authority and lordship which is now discovered by this

seal of power, were ought else than a declension, preparing the pathway of anti-christ? From the Gospel it is evident, that the children of Christ's kingdom were not produced by such means, but were the fruit of his poverty, his humility and his suffering of injury. The same blessed man, St. Bernard, writes thus: 'I fear not any greater befalling thee than this eager thirsting for dominion.'

This celebrated reply of Wycliffe, which we have given as fully as our limits will admit, could not but have the effect of exasperating the wrath and indignation with which the Pope and the priests were already animated against him. He must have foreseen that this would be the case; and the candid and fearless nature of his reply, therefore, does him the greatest honour. Like the illustrious reformer John Knox, of whom he may be looked upon as the prototype, he feared not the face of man, and was regardless of all considerations that affected himself, when employed in the discharge of what he reckoned his duty. The English priesthood had found, as we have

already seen, their authority to be too feeble either to induce him to abate his labours or to diminish his influence. It is not indeed unlikely that their endeavours for this purpose had had an effect the contrary of that at which they aimed, and had promoted that cause which they wished to destroy. They, accordingly, now applied to the Pope; and nineteen heretical articles, alleged to be selected from his writings, from his lectures in the university, or from his conversation, were transmitted to Rome for the consideration of his Holiness and the cardinals. These articles contain almost every error of which, under such an exclusive church as that of Rome, a man could be accused; but the general tendency of them may be very briefly expressed; namely his condemnation of the Pope's assumed temporal and spiritual power, and of the worldly possessions of the Roman hierarchy. For a more minute catalogue of the heresies charged against our Reformer, we refer the reader to Mr. Vaughan's interesting work. Meanwhile we proceed to state, that on the transmission of

this grave and lengthened accusation to the sovereign pontiff, that exalted personage lost no time in taking those decisive steps which the Anglican church seems to have expected. He warmly espoused the cause of Wycliffe's accusers; and in November 1377, he dispatched no fewer than five bulls to England on the subject; three addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, one to the university of Oxford, and the fifth to the king. They were all of similar import; the Pope expresses his regret that, in that very kingdom, which used to produce men endued with a right knowledge of the Scriptures, grave, devout, and champions of the orthodox faith, those whose office it is to be watchmen, are slothful and negligent, inso-much that the latent motions and open attempts of enemies are perceived at Rome, situated at a great distance, before they are opposed in England. He states that he had heard with concern from persons worthy of credit, that John Wycliffe, rector of Lutterworth, and professor of divinity, with a fearlessness, the offspring of

a detestable insanity, had ventured to dogmatize and preach in favour of opinions, wholly subversive of the church, and contrary to its faith. He therefore commands the parties whom he addressed to seize the person of the offender, in the name of the Pope, to commit him to prison; to obtain distinct and complete information respecting the real nature of his tenets; and, transmitting such information to Rome, to keep their prisoner in custody till they should get farther directions concerning him. In case they should fail in their attempts to apprehend him, they are directed to fix a citation in such places as they thought might attract his attention, demanding his personal appearance before the pontiff within three months. The prelates were farther enjoined to use their best endeavour to prevent the king, the royal family, and the nobility, from being defiled with these errors, but to be sincere and fervent in the faith, and believe such doctrines subversive of all government.

Such were these bulls, and such were the peremptory means which the Pope

thought it his duty to employ, in order to defeat the influence of this early reformer. But his holiness, like other men in irresponsible situations, imagined he could check the progress of truth, or put an end to public opinion, merely by issuing an order to that effect. Such attempts are generally futile, as they were in this instance. Public opinion and genuine religion, when once introduced, will, like hope, continue to advance, however silently, or however strongly resisted. The university of Oxford received the commands of the Pope with much reluctance, and not till after much discussion; but, to their honour be it recorded, they took no steps in the business on which his holiness had addressed them: it would have been an unspeakable disgrace to the university, had they acted otherwise, and denounced a man who formed their greatest ornament. The prelates, however, entered with zeal into the views of the Pope. Wycliffe was summoned to appear before them at Lambeth. Nor did he hesitate to obey. He appeared on the day appointed; and though the power of the

Duke of Lancaster was much diminished, events discovered that he was far from requiring even his aid on the present occasion. On the court and the populace, his doctrines were daily making a powerful impression. The latter, alarmed for his safety, surrounded the place of meeting, and with many of the citizens, forced their way into the chapel where the meeting was held, proclaiming their attachment to the person and opinions of the rector of Lutterworth. Nor was this all. Sir Lewis Clifford entered the court, and, in the name of the Queen-Dowager, forbade the bishop to pass any definite sentence regarding the conduct or doctrine of Wycliffe. The laity, on this occasion, as in a former instance, showed themselves superior to their spiritual guides in Christian liberality and feeling; and the plans of ecclesiastics to suppress the new tenets were a second time unsuccessful. The bishops, we are told, "being shaken as a reed with the wind, immediately became as soft as oil in their speech, to the open forfeiture of their own dignity, and the injury of their own church.

With such fears were they struck, that you would think them a man who hears not, or one in whose mouths are no reproofs."

Wycliffe, however, was not unprepared to meet his accusers or to enter on a defence of his doctrines. The truth is, he had prepared a written statement of his opinions, which he delivered to the prelates. Of the nature and character of this document, there have been various opinions; but without entering into discussions, we hesitate not, with Mr. Vaughan, to declare, that, in our judgment, it is worthy of our Reformer's character, being characterized by the same intrepid avowal of truth, and the same detestation of corruption, which he had uniformly exhibited. The introduction to it deserves to be quoted:

"In the first place, I protest publicly, as I have often done, that I resolve, with my whole heart, and by the grace of God, to be a sincere Christian; and, while life shall last, to profess and to defend the law of Christ as far as I have power. If through ignorance, or from any other cause, I shall fail in this determination,

I ask forgiveness of God,—and, retracting the error, I submit with humility to the correction of the church. And to prevent the Christian from being scandalized on my account, since I am persecuted for my faith, and since the notions of children and weak persons, concerning what I have taught, are conveyed by others, beyond the seas, even to the court of Rome, I am willing to commit my opinion to writing. These also I am now ready to defend, *even unto death*; and the same duty I regard as binding upon all Christians, but particularly on the Bishop of Rome, and on the whole priesthood of the church. In my conclusion I have followed the sacred Scriptures, and the holy doctors, both in their meaning and modes of expression; this I am willing to show, but should it be proved that such conclusions are opposed to the faith, I am prepared, very willingly, to retract them.”

Of this document we shall not give any farther account. Nor is it necessary; for it contains little else than a reiteration of the opinions of which we have already taken

notice. But we cannot resist remarking, that this introduction is distinguished alike for its boldness, its candour, and its piety. It is honourable to Wycliffe both as a man and a Christian. In our estimation it entitles him to a high place among those sincere Christians “of whom the world was not worthy.” Under no circumstances “was he ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” He seems to have been actuated by the elevated sentiment of St. Paul—“if I suffer with Christ, I shall also reign with him.” Indeed he appears to have acted upon the advice given by another apostle; “if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear, having a good conscience.” The foregoing words are not more applicable to our Reformer than the subsequent, which immediately follow them, are to his accusers:—“Whereas they seek evil of you as of evil doers, many may be

be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

We have imputed the escape of Wycliffe on this occasion to the liberal interference of the Queen-Mother and of the populace.* Certainly much was owing to these circumstances, but something also was due to the distractions of the times. The Roman church presented the singular appearance of two rival Popes. On the death of Gregory, the late pontiff, two opposite factions sprung up; the Christian world was divided between them: and the two new Popes were supported respectively by different portions of Europe. “And which of the two,” says Mosheim, “is to be considered as the true and lawful Pope is to this day matter of doubt; nor will the re-

* We almost forgot to mention, that an anonymous writer attacked Wycliffe's doctrines respecting the infallibility of the Pope. This antagonist affirmed the Pope to be incapable of sin, and that therefore whatever he ordained must be just. Our reformer replied to this “motley theologian,” as he called him, with that boldness and want of ceremony which such absurd tenets demanded.

records and witnesses alleged by the contending parties enable us to adjust that point with any certainty." We shall not enter on this controversy, which shook popery to its very foundation, as an account of it would tend so little to edification. Nor, though Wycliffe took a part in the discussion, did he do so in that spirit of party or of worldly and secular violence which then unhappily predominated. He took advantage of this schism in the church, to inculcate the most solemn truths, to open the eyes of his countrymen to a true sense of the Roman hierarchy, and thus to accelerate its downfall. He published a tract "On the schism of the Popes," full of the most important discussions, and striking more directly and powerfully than before at the root of that spiritual despotism which had so long kept the Christian world in thralldom. "Christ," says he, "has begun to help us graciously in struggling for our freedom, because he has cloven the head of Anti-Christ, and made the two parts fight against each other. For it is not doubtful that the sin of the Popes, which has been so long continued,

hath brought in this division." By various arguments he wrests from the hands of churchmen those weapons which had been wielded long and successfully both against true and undefiled religion, and against civil liberty. His pulpit discourses, also, were directed to the same object. Referring to this schism, he declares that the Pope is not on Christ's side, because Christ gave his life for his sheep, but on the side of Anti-Christ, who sacrifices many lives for his pride. This man feedeth not the sheep of Christ, as Christ thrice commanded Peter, but spoileth them and slayeth them, and leadeth them many wrong ways." In short, to restore men, as Mr. Vaughan remarks, to the more enlightened service of their Maker, by rendering the fear of God, and not the fear of man, the ruling temper of the mind, was the devout purpose to which this event is ever applied.

About the same time our Reformer completed another work, entitled "On the Truth and Meaning of Scripture," said by Mr. Vaughan to be the most extended, if not the most systematically arranged, of all

his works. It embodies almost every sentiment peculiar to the mind of its author; and it contains the most complete exposure of the corruptions, both civil and religious, of the Roman Catholic church. Of this work, of which two copies only are known to be extant, none of Wycliffe's biographers have given an analysis, though they all speak of it in terms of unqualified approbation: but it may not be improper to remark, that in it he first contended for the necessity of a translation of the Bible into the English language; a task which he had the honour to be the first to perform, and which, by enabling the people to judge for themselves, did more to accelerate the downfall of popery, and to promote the progress of the reformation, than every other circumstance taken together. On this subject we shall soon have occasion to speak more fully.

But though Wycliffe escaped from the persecution of his enemies, and had hitherto with uninterrupted good health been enabled for twenty years to make those great efforts as a Reformer, of which we have given an account, yet the labour, and ex-

citements, and hostilities to which he had been exposed, so shook his frame at this period as to put his valuable life in imminent danger. The disease, with which he was attacked, was of a paralytic kind, which a few years afterwards, was the cause of his death. But though he seemed rapidly approaching his end, the violence of his enemies was not softened. They flattered themselves that now, when he was brought low, they would gain a triumph over him, and that he would be induced to confess and relinquish what they regarded as his errors. But little do they seem to have known of the real character of their opponent. Wycliffe was at Oxford when he was seized with this malady. A deputation, consisting of four friars of different orders, and of four senators of the city, were appointed to wait on him. When they entered his apartment, he was stretched upon his bed, unable to raise himself up. Struck with their appearance, he inquired with feeble voice who his visitors were; upon which, after expressing what they did not feel, some kind wishes as to his better health and a

recovery from his present affliction, they informed him that they had been deputed to impress on his mind the wrongs which the mendicant friars had sustained at his hand, and to implore him that, as he was now apparently at the point of death, he would no longer retain an impenitent and hardened heart, but would express contrition for the crying injuries he had done their order. The sick man remained silent and motionless till this address was concluded. He then raised his hand and beckoned to his servants to place pillows behind him, that he might be enabled to sit upright: and fixing his eyes on his visitors, all emaciated as he was, he cried with a loud voice, *I shall not die, but live, and yet declare the evil deeds of the friars.* Struck with these words, and with the solemn and intrepid manner in which they were uttered, the deputation hurried from his presence: they were awed into reverence and silence: they seemed as if they had heard a prophetic announcement; and they lived indeed to see the truth of Wycliffe's declaration. The scene, in truth, was a

most imposing one : nor would it be easy to imagine any circumstance more characteristic of our illustrious Reformer or more honourable to him.

The duration of his sickness we are not told ; but, under providence, he was doomed to survive it, and to acquire new and more splendid triumphs in the cause of reformation. But on this subject we shall not enter in the present chapter.

CHAPTER V.

Wycliffe was the first to translate the whole Scriptures into the English Tongue.—Various partial Translations before his time.—His Motives for undertaking the task.—The manner in which he executed it.—The opposition he experienced.—The happy effects of his Labours.

AT the conclusion of the preceding chapter, we stated that, after his sickness, Wycliffe achieved more splendid triumphs in the cause of reformation than he had previously gained. We alluded, in particular, to his translation of the Bible into the English tongue; of which we now proceed to give an account.

When Christianity was introduced into England, the Bible was made known to the learned of that country in the Latin language. That sacred book was never

known in a Celtic or Gaelic dress ; and the Hebrew or Greek were not introduced into this island till two or three centuries after the time of Wycliffe. The Bible, therefore, being in the Latin tongue, could be known only to scholars,—of whom, indeed, there were very few in these days. From the time of the departure of the Romans, the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman dialects successively became the vernacular tongue ; and under such circumstances, the volume of inspiration was a sealed book to the great body of them. Some partial attempts, indeed, were made to translate it into the language of the country ; and, so far as they went, these attempts were attended with much good. With regard to their nature and extent, however, there have been various opinions ; but, without entangling ourselves in antiquarian discussions, we may affirm that, though several detached portions of the sacred volume had been given to the people in their vernacular tongue before the time of Wycliffe, that celebrated man was the first to lay before his countrymen a translation of the whole

of that inspired book. This is an honour of which it would be in vain to attempt to deprive him ;* and it is one which entitles him to be enrolled among the most illustrious benefactors of mankind. A literal translation of the entire Scriptures, to use the words of Mr. Vaughan, was strictly a new event in our religious history ; and the publication of such a work to be the property, not of distinguished individuals, but of *the people in general*, was a measure far beyond any thing contemplated by his precursors in the labours of translation.

The translation of the Scriptures, into the vernacular language of England, so that the people might be enabled to read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God, he had had long in view ; and of the necessity and paramount importance of the measure he

* For some particulars on this subject, the reader may consult the various *Lives of Wycliffe*, particularly Mr. Baber's *Hist. Acc. of the Saxon and English Versions of the Scriptures, previous to the opening of the 15th century*. See also some notices in Dr. Lee's *Memorial on the Bible Societies*, Edin. 1824, p. 21-2 ; and Orme's *Bibliotheca Biblica*, p. 33, et seq.

had been for years fully aware. The extracts from his works, which we have provisionally given, afford ample proof of both these positions. We have not room, nor is it necessary, to multiply such extracts; but the following it may not be uninteresting to give:

“ As it is evident that the truth of the Christian faith becomes more obvious the more the faith itself is known, and that bishops condemn in the ear of secular lords what is faithful and true, on account of hatred to the person who maintains it,—honest men are bound to declare the doctrine which they hold, not only in Latin, but in the vulgar tongue, that the truth may be more plainly and more widely known. * * Those heretics ought not to be listened to, who imagine that temporal lords should not possess the law of God, but that it is sufficient for them to know what may be learned from the lips of their priests and prelates. * * As the faith of the church is contained in the Scriptures, the more these are known in an orthodox sense the better. And since secular men should assuredly

understand the faith, it should be taught them in whatever language is best known to them. Inasmuch, also, as the truth of the faith is clearer and more exact in the Scripture than the priests are known to express it; inasmuch, if one may say so, as there are many prelates who are too ignorant of the Scripture, and as others conceal points of Scripture, and as there are many other defects in the verbal instructions of priests,—the conclusion seems obvious, that believers should ascertain for themselves the matters of their faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which they know and understand. Besides, it was by faith, as described by the apostle, (*Hebrews*, chap. xi.) that the saints of old overcame kingdoms, and hastened to their own country. Why then should not the things of faith be disclosed to the people now, so that they may comprehend them more clearly. He, in consequence, who shall prevent this, or murmur against it, does his utmost to continue the people in a state of unbelief and condemnation. Hence, also, the laws made by prelates are not to be received as matters

of faith; nor are we to confide in their public instructions or in any of their words, but as they are founded on holy writ; for according to the constant doctrine of Augustine, the Scriptures contain the whole of truth; and this translation of them should therefore do at least this good, viz. placing bishops and priests above suspicion as to the parts of it which they profess to explain. Other means, also, as prelates, the pope and friars, may prove defective; and to provide against this, Christ and his apostles evangelized the greater portion of the world, by making known the Scriptures in a language which was familiar to the people. To this end, indeed, did the Holy Ghost endow them with the 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."**

The Reformer then proceeds solemnly to inculcate the doctrine of *individual responsibility* as extending to all the matters of faith and practice. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in

his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." From the certainty also; that, on that awful occasion when every man shall stand before his judge, the answer of a canonist or prelate will be of no avail, he again vindicates his appeal to the right of private judgment, and urges on the laity the duty of a devout attention to whatever may promote their faith in the grace of the Saviour, and obedience to his will. "God," says he, "will require of every man in the day of judgment a full account of the use to which he has put the talent that may have been given him."

Such were the enlightened views which Wycliffe entertained on this subject; and such the pious motives in which his labours in this great enterprize originated. He desired not only that to the poor the Gospel should be preached, but that they might have in their own tongue that book which alone "testifieth of Jesus, and maketh wise unto salvation." He knew that to render the Bible accessible and familiar to the people, was to introduce a light that would dispel the darkness, in which the world had for

centuries been enveloped, and to put an end to ignorance, imposture, and superstition. And in order to gain this object the more effectually, and to disperse generally among the people the Word of God, he subdivided the New Testament into various small volumes. These contained either the four Gospels, or St. Paul's Epistles, or the General Epistles and the book of Revelation, or some other similar portion. The time he spent on the work cannot now be ascertained: it is likely that it had been his favourite task for years, as from his writings we learn that he had been early impressed with the vast importance of the work. The Latin Vulgate, then in use, was that from which he translated, as he was not acquainted with the Greek or Hebrew; neither of which languages had then been introduced into Britain: and his version is in many places so strictly literal that to one unacquainted with the Latin, it is not unfrequently obscure. Of this version we shall give a very brief specimen at the end of this volume.

This great achievement of the transla-

tion of the Bible was not more useful to the people than it was detested and condemned by the clergy. They cried out that the "Gospel-pearl, in being freely communicated to the people, was cast to swine and trodden under feet; that the jewel of the church, which was the Bible, had been committed expressly to the clergy and doctors, in order that by them it might be ministered to the laity and weaker persons, according to the exigency of the times, and the wants of these weaker members; that to translate it, so that all could read it, was to intrude on what had ever been the chief talent committed to the clergy; and to make the Bible, which had been heretofore revered both by the clergy, and the laity, the common jest of both orders." It was contended, that the prelates ought not to suffer that every one at his pleasure should read the Scriptures, because it was plain from experience that this has frequently been the occasion of falling into heresies and errors. It is not, therefore, politic, they say, that every one wheresoever and whensoever he will, should give himself

to the fervent study of the Scriptures." Nay, it was insisted upon "that the decrees of bishop in the church were of greater authority, weight, and dignity, than the Scriptures themselves."

Nor is it to be wondered at, that the church was averse to the translation of the Word of God into the vernacular language, and to its general diffusion among the people. Such a state of things was directly calculated to expose their own want of learning, and their almost total ignorance of that blessed book. Some even of the dignified clergy had never read the Bible, and knew no more of its contents than what they had met with in their missals. And they were as totally devoid of erudition and secular knowledge. Under such spiritual guides, the people perished for lack of knowledge. That book which was able to make them wise unto Salvation, and intended to be accessible equally to "Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free," was locked up from them, and the use of it, in their own tongues, prohibited under the heaviest penalties. The

religious service was mumbled over in a dead language, which many of the priests did not understand, and some of them could scarcely read; and the greatest care was taken to prevent, not the Bible merely, but even Catechisms, composed and approved by the clergy, from coming into the hands of the laity.

Under such circumstances, we cannot sufficiently admire Wycliffe for the unspeakable benefit he conferred on his countrymen, and for the great impulse he gave to the triumph of divine truth. He presented his contemporaries with a translation of the inspired volume in their own language, at a time when, except through divine agency, it was almost impossible for him to have undertaken such a hazardous task. But overlooking any persecution to which he might be exposed, "he studied to show himself approved unto God." He seems to have realized, in his conduct, the apostolical injunctions which St. Paul enforced on the Christian brethren of Ephesus. "He put on the whole armour of God, that he might be able to stand against the

wiles of the devil; for he wrestled not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. He took unto himself the whole armour of God, that he might be able to withstand in the evil day. He had his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, he took the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Under the influence of such divine impulses, and regardless of what man might do to him, he communicated to his countrymen a knowledge of that book "which alone contains the word of eternal life."*

* Wycliffe's translation was completed in 1383. It still remains in MS. (of which there are numerous copies), with the exception of the New Testament, which was first published by Lewis in 1731, and reprinted in 1810 under the superintendence of Mr. Barber.

CHAPTER VI.

Wycliffe attacks the Romish doctrine of Transubstantiation, both in his Lectures in the University and from the Pulpit.—The Church is offended at this.—Steps taken against him by the University.—He appeals to the King and the Court.—Result of that Appeal.—Various persecutions to which he is exposed.—Summoned before a Convocation at Oxford.—His defence.—Driven from the University, and retires to Lutterworth.

HAVING completed the greatest work which he was honoured of God to perform, the translation of the Bible, Wycliffe did not think himself warranted to remain idle or to desert the good cause which he had so auspiciously begun. He commenced an attack against one of the most heretical and absurd doctrines of the Romish church, namely transubstantiation,—by which was meant, that, in the holy sacrament of the supper, the bread and wine, after being

consecrated by the priest, was changed into the real body and blood of Christ. No doctrine can be imagined more idolatrous or blasphemous; and yet to deny or to doubt it, was to be guilty of a crime deserving the most decided interposition of the church. This tenet, though in the days of Wycliffe an indispensable one, had not been heard of for eight centuries after the death of our blessed Saviour: the opinion then prevalent was that, which now obtains in orthodox, protestant churches, namely, that the elements of bread and wine, used in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, were only figuratively meant to represent the body and blood of Christ. But though the doctrine of transubstantiation had been but recently introduced as an article of papal faith, it was not on that account the less revered, or regarded as less obligatory. It was indispensably necessary to believe and to recognise it. This doctrine, though fortified by the bulwarks of the church, and though to doubt it was denominated heresy, our Reformer, fully persuaded of its falsehood and absurdity, did not hesitate to ex-

pose. He knew the evils to which on this account he might be exposed; but animated with a love of truth, and drawing his opinions from the volume of inspiration, he was prepared to encounter them. Of the spirit in which he took this step, we may judge from the following extract which forms the introduction to "The Wicket," one of his most popular treatises on this 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 knowledge, that there are two manners of ways, 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 his holy spirit, as to make us strong in spiritual living according to the gospel, that so the world, no not the very infidels, papists or apostates, may gather any occasion to speak evil of us; that we may enter into that strait

gate, as Christ our Saviour and all that followed him have done, *not in living but in diligent labouring—yea, in great sufferance of persecution even to the death.*”

The doctrines promulgated by Wycliffe relative to this gross error of the papal church, were first brought forward in his sermons: they were afterwards enforced in his lectures as professor of divinity. The novelty of them did not in any degree attract public attention till the year 1381, when he published twelve conclusions, at which he had arrived respecting them. These conclusions have been printed by Mr. Vaughan; and though a few of them are somewhat vague, it is evident from the general tenor of them that he was completely opposed to the doctrine of popery on the subject. In the first of them he asserts “that the consecrated host, which we see upon the altar, is neither Christ, nor any part of him, *but an effectual sign of him.*” In the fifth he maintains that transubstantiation, or any word

of similar import, of which the friars used many, have no foundation in Scripture.

After the publication of these conclusions, Wycliffe offered, according to the custom of the times, to defend them publicly against all who might present themselves. It is not likely that any would have been found willing to enter the lists with a man whose intrepidity and whose powers of debate were so conspicuous. But at any rate no discussion would have been allowed. The truth is, William de Breton, the chancellor of the university, dreading the influence of Wycliffe's eloquence, if any public exposition or defence of his new opinions were permitted, interfered to prevent it. In his efforts to silence the Reformer, and to check the diffusion of his opinions, he persuaded twelve of the doctors of the university, eight of whom were either monks or mendicants, to join him in signing a programme; by which it was ordained that no member of that institution should be permitted, under pain of imprisonment and suspension from his office, to hold these unauthorized doctrines, or to dis-

pate upon them. The same penalties were also adjudged by this notable junto to such as should be convicted of listening to any defence of these "erroneous assertions."

The meeting, in which these resolutions were adopted, appears to have been privately convened. At the moment when it was held, Wycliffe was seated in his chair as professor, and lecturing to a crowded audience on the very subject against which its fulminations were directed. Without showing him that degree of respect to which, on account of his official situation, he was entitled, the chancellor and his coadjutors despatched a messenger to him, who entered his class-room, and in presence of his students, pronounced the resolutions which we have already given. Taken by surprise, and in doubt as to the best mode of resisting the hostility which had so suddenly assumed this formidable shape, the lecturer paused. The rude intrusion, and the object which it was meant to serve, overpowered him. But a moment was sufficient to restore his confidence. He then arose—challenged the collected

strength of his opponents to a fair refutation of his published opinions,—and characterized the insulting step which had been taken as unworthy of the cause in which it was employed. He had often declared it to be the duty of the magistrates to protect the life, the property, and, in all such cases as the present, the personal freedom of the subject. On this maxim he was now resolved to act with a firmness not inferior to that of his adversaries. The alternative placed before him was silence or imprisonment; and the chancellor was, therefore, informed that, if the question was to be one of force and not of reason, he would appeal, not to the pope, for he no longer recognised his authority, but to the king in parliament.

Nor was he a man to threaten, and not to carry into effect. He did appeal, as he had said, and the appeal is entitled “A complaint of John Wycliffe to the king and parliament,”—and consists of four parts. The first is, “that the rule laid down by Christ in the gospel, for the attainment of salvation, is more perfect than that invented

by St. Francis, St. Benedict, or any other." The second asserts "that the king has power to punish ecclesiastical persons convicted of certain crimes." The third article treats of tithes and offerings. And the fourth affirms "that Christ's teaching and belief of the sacrament of his own body, which is plainly taught by Christ and his apostles, in gospels and epistles, may be openly taught in churches of christian people." And he concludes with a prayer, "that God of his mercy would stir these priests to preach the gospel in word and life, and to beware of Satan's deceits."*

A considerable interval, however, had to elapse before the meeting of the next parliament; during which time Wycliffe either did not lecture at all at Oxford, or he confined his lectures on topics less dangerous to his personal safety. It is not unlikely, indeed, that he spent his interval chiefly in the peaceful and faithful discharge of his sacred duties at Lutterworth; and it seems

* The above paragraph we owe to Mr. Tytler; but an extremely full account of this "Complaint" is given by Mr. Vaughan. (Vol. ii. pp. 117—126.)

that this partial silence, imposed on him, induced him to resume his pen, in order to give greater publicity to his opinions. During this period he produced "The Wicket," a work that has been often reprinted, and in which, after alluding to the severe treatment he had experienced, he expounds and illustrates the opinion with which reason and a diligent perusal of the Scripture had inspired him, on the subject at issue. Referring to the absurd doctrine of transubstantiation, he asks, "May the thing made turn again, and make him who made it? Thou then that art an earthly man, by what reason mayest thou say that thou makest their Maker? * * Can it be believed that the thing, such as bread and wine, which is not God to-day, shall be God to-morrow: Yea, that the thing, which is without spirit of life, but groweth in the field by nature, shall another time be God? And still, in contradiction of this, must we believe that God is without beginning and without ending?"

The parliament which took Wycliffe's "Complaint" into consideration met at Ox,

ford a few months after this document was drawn out; and the impression which it made, when it was laid before them, must have been highly gratifying to our Reformer. The members of the Commons petitioned the king on the subject; and as the resolution of the chancellor to the doctors, which was complained of, "had never been agreed to, nor granted by the Commons, but whatever was moved therein was without their consent," it is required, "that the said resolution be rescinded." And it is further declared to be "in no wise their meaning, that either themselves, or such as shall succeed them, shall be farther bound to the prelates than were their ancestors in former times."

But the support which Wycliffe thus received, and the hopes which it was calculated to excite, were not destined long to cheer him. Though parliament had come to the manly resolution to which we have just referred, that high court did not use means to carry its own enactment into effect. Nothing, indeed, was more common in those days than the violation of oaths and pro-

mises on the part both of the sovereign and his government. Such was in part the case in the present instance. The resolution in question was not rescinded, as the house of commons had required; nor was the hostility of the church abated by the decision of that court, particularly as such decision was not followed up by any energetic steps on the part of government.

The church, indeed, had not been an inattentive spectator of Wycliffe's proceedings, since the first promulgation of his opinions relative to transubstantiation. She had, in truth, been doing all in her power to frustrate his efforts, and to expose his person to danger. Courtney, bishop of London, had (1381) been elevated to the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury, and was now distinguished by the designation of "pillar of the church." No sooner was he invested with his new dignity than he called a synod to deliberate concerning certain doctrines, diffused "as well among the nobility as the commons of this realm of England." This assembly soon met, consisting of eight prelates, fourteen doctors of

the civil and canon law, two bachelors of divinity, fifteen monks, and four mendicants. They convened in the monastery of the Grey-friars in London; and the object of the Archbishop seems to have been to procure a formal condemnation of the obnoxious tenets, and afterwards to commence an unsparing persecution of such as should hesitate to renounce them. The meeting was about to proceed to business when the city was visited by an earthquake, and the house in which they were met was shaken to its foundation. The members, with pale looks and trembling voices, entreated for an adjournment; and were about to leave the convocation, regarding the object they had in view "as at variance with the will of heaven." But the primate who presided, with great presence of mind and great ingenuity, conferred a different meaning on the alarming event, and reconciled the meeting to remain. "The earthquake," says he, "portends a purging of the kingdom from heresies, inasmuch as there are included in the bowels of the earth air and noxious spirits, and they are expelled in an

earthquake,—and so the earth is cleansed, but not without great violence : so, in the hearts of reprobate men, were many heresies shut up ; but, by the condemnation of them, the kingdom has been cleared, though not without irksomeness and great commotions.” The courage of the meeting being thus restored, they proceeded to business, and determined on twenty-four heretical conclusions which had been preached “ generally, commonly, and publicly through the province of Canterbury, and the realm of England.” After a grave deliberation of three days, ten of these conclusions were condemned as heretical ; the remainder as erroneous. They then proceeded to excommunicate all persons who, in time coming, should dare to maintain and promulgate any of them. And to render their meeting and their authority the more imposing and authoritative, the whole of the clergy and the principal persons of the laity marched barefooted through the streets of London, emblematic of their repentance for the foul heresies which they had suffered to gain ground. The solemn procession having

arrived at St. Paul's, a friar ascended the pulpit, and harangued the assembled multitude on the state of the times, and on what was their duty at so alarming a crisis.

All this was aimed at Wycliffe: indeed that obnoxious person had been summoned to appear before the court assembled at the Greyfriars; but the summons having been directed to him as professor of divinity, he claimed, as a member of the university, to be exempted from all episcopal jurisdiction, and on this ground he refused to obey. Nor was this probably his only reason: for he had obtained information that a plot had been laid by the prelates to seize his person on his road to the court; and he may have thought it his duty not to expose his life voluntarily to danger.

Disappointed in getting the person of Wycliffe into his power, or in his not having appeared as summoned before his ecclesiastical superiors, the archbishop did not rest satisfied with the steps which we have just mentioned. He addressed a letter to the bishop of Lincoln, the diocese in which Lutterworth was situated, (as well as to

other prelates), enjoining that "no man from henceforth, of what estate or condition soever, do hold, preach, or defend the fore-said heresies and errors, or any of them; and that none be admitted to preach that is prohibited, or not sent to preach, under pain of the greater excommunication." A similar command was laid upon the university of Oxford. But in neither of these applications does the primate seem to have been successful. As we hear of no steps having been taken by the bishop of Lincoln, we are warranted in concluding that none were adopted; and we know that the university, instead of having recourse to measures against him, were favourable both to himself and to his opinions. The truth is, the chancellor, William de Berton, already mentioned, was now no more, and had been succeeded by Robert Rigge,—a scholar, who exposed himself to much inconvenience and suffering from his attachment to the Reformer's doctrines. The chancellor was supported by a majority of the members of the university; indeed so fearlessly was this leaning avowed, that two

clergymen who, at different times, were preaching before the chancellor and his colleagues, pronounced in their discourses a passionate eulogy on the character and the general doctrines of the rector of Lutterworth.

Under such circumstances, the prelates and clergy applied to the civil power, and preferred to the king a series of complaints against this obnoxious Reformer, against his doctrine, and against his supporters; which last were designated *Lollards*—a name which had long been applied to certain sectaries on the continent, and which was understood to express every thing that was erroneous and degraded.* Thirteen heretical articles were specified as being abetted or promulgated by them; and such was the influence of the accusers, that the sanction of the king and the house of peers was obtained to a statute providing for the punishment of the variable crime denominated heresy. The concluding clause of this statute is as follows: “It is ordained and

* For some particulars respecting the term *Lollard*, see Appendix.

assented in this present parliament, that royal commissions be made and directed to the sheriffs and the ministers of our sovereign lord the king, or other sufficient persons learned, and according to the certifications of the prelates, to arrest all preachers whose sermons contain heresies and notorious errors, and also their favourers, maintainers, and abettors, and to hold them in arrest and strong prison till they will justify themselves according to the law and reason of holy church." This statute, which was privately or rather surreptitiously obtained, and which rendered the civil authorities of the kingdom the passive instruments of a persecuting church, was published under the pretended authority of an act of parliament. But such was the popularity of Wycliffe's opinions in the house of commons, that they positively refused their assent to any such law; and it was probably owing to this circumstance that, though peremptory commands were again laid on the university of Oxford, and other harsh steps taken, the enactment in question was never carried into effect.

We have not time, nor would it be edifying to pursue these persecuting proceedings much farther. In most of the biographies of Wycliffe, an account of them occupies an ample place, and the narrative which that account forms is, from the nature of the subject, extremely dry, obscure, and uninteresting. Under every circumstance, the words of St. Paul are not inapplicable to our Reformer: "He was troubled on every side, yet not distressed; he was perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his body."

But of the last effort that was made to crush him we cannot refrain from giving a brief account. He was summoned to appear before a convocation of prelates and clergy at Oxford, consisting of the most eminent and influential members of the church, and some doctors of the university. "Around them," says Mr. Vaughan, whose account is the only full and direct one, "the laity were crowded as auditors,

variously interested in the design of the meeting. Before this imposing array of authority and learning, all marshalled against him, stood the rector of Lutterworth. More than forty years had now elapsed since Oxford had first become pleasingly connected with his sympathies. Through that long period, it had been more or less his home; and viewing it as an establishment formed to nurse the intellect of the nation in subservience to religion and philanthropy, he had always been among the foremost to defend its jurisdiction as independent of foreign control, especially of that which proceeded from the papacy. He was now grey with age, or rather, perhaps, as the effect of those religious solitudes and that mental activity, which appears always to have surpassed the ability of his feebler nature, and to have been constantly exposing him to the inroads of disease. The place in which he now appeared, and under the charge of so much delinquency, had frequently echoed to the utterance of his praise by admiring converts; and to the sound of

his voice as the advocate of doctrines endeared to the purer ages of the church. Nor is it to be supposed that his numerous followers had become suddenly extinct. His early patron, the duke of Lancaster, now indeed showed lukewarmness to his cause, inasmuch as he advised him in all doctrinal points to submit to the decision of the prelates. At this moment, in truth, the scale of power had so much descended in favour of the established superstitions, that, like another Elijah, the Reformer stood apparently alone amid the generation of his countrymen. Still, while certain affecting recollections were doubtless fresh within him; and while his present circumstances were quite alarming enough to have shaken even an extraordinary mind, such was his conviction of the goodness of his cause that his firmness remained wholly unbroken. The aspect of things at this moment presented a powerful test both to the integrity and the energy of his character: and the result has placed him among the most distinguished of professors. To have denied his doctrine on the eu-

charist, or indeed simply to have abstained from teaching it, would have been to continue sheltered from the hostility of the church, by the power of one who was still the second man in the kingdom. To proceed in exposing the weakness and impiety of the received opinions on that sacrament,—and this in opposition to the serious opposition of the Duke of Lancaster, was deliberately to encounter the unbridled malevolence of his enemies. The latter course, whatever it might cost him, was the object of his choice. The truth is, the commands of the duke affected his purposes in no degree more than the injunctions of the primate. He had resolved, at every risk, to hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering, and he was ready, at all times, to give to those who might ask it, a reason of the belief that he entertained.”

Thus animated and thus resolved, he entered upon his defence, and “like an obstinate heretic,” we are told, “he refuted all the doctors of the second millenary.” In addition to this oral exculpation, he

gave in written confessions, containing the most distinct announcement of what he had previously taught relative to the sacrament. Of these confessions there was one copy in Latin, another in English. He first treats the question in a scholastic style, suited to the taste of the more learned of his judges; while the English document touches but distantly on the distinctions of the schools, and is framed to meet the popular apprehension. It was not unusual to exact confession from suspected persons in this double form; and had those of Wycliffe disclosed any abandonment of opinion, both would probably have been read with studied publicity in the schools of the university and from the pulpits of the clergy.

But though Wycliffe not only renewed his attack on the doctrines of the Roman church respecting the sacrament, and though he reiterated his own opinion on that subject with as much uncompromising boldness as he had ever displayed, yet he has most unjustly been described as recanting his sentiments. "It still con-

tinues," says Mr. Vaughan, "to be repeated, and has been made the ground of insinuations designed to fix on our reformer the charge of disingenuousness and timidity. This kind of proceeding may sometimes have arisen from weakness or misapprehension; in others, from indolence; and in many, it is difficult to view it but as the effect of that imperfect reverence for truth, commonly the result of party zeal. The denial, indeed, of transubstantiation in the above documents is too evident to require farther notice; and if there are expressions in both which betray some hesitation of thought as to the precise manner in which the body and blood of Christ are really present with their visible emblems in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, it is certain that these expressions were by no means peculiar to the present crisis. A subject upon which, more than a century afterwards, the vigorous mind of Luther, aided as it was by the increased lights which arose from the advanced state of knowledge, could not discern the truth, can hardly be expected to

have been any thing but perplexed and intricate to his great precursor. But though he might not perhaps have seen the truth clearly, he discovered and exposed the absurdity of the Romish doctrine on the subject.

But, whatever may have been the light which he enjoyed relative to the true nature of the Holy Supper, that light was sufficient to reveal to him the errors and corruptions that attached to this sacred ordinance, and to expose him to the reprobation of his judges. But the convocation, however guilty they reckoned him, were at a loss what steps to adopt. They knew that he had obtained no mean place in the affections of the people; they were aware that not a few of the most learned and the most respectable persons of the nation held him in high estimation and reverence; and that among these, in addition to the Duke of Lancaster, were the Queen-Mother, the Duke of Gloucester, brother to Lancaster, the Queen of the reigning Sovereign, and many others of great power and high rank. Wycliffe,

indeed, expresses his thankfulness that "many knights favoured the gospel, and had a mind to read it in English." The high friendships and patronage which he enjoyed must have greatly annoyed his enemies. But it is not easy for vengeance to sleep or to be eradicated. They applied to the king and to the Lord Chancellor. The weak monarch was easily gained over; and the chancellor was already prepossessed against this alleged heretic and his doctrines; and the result was, that in July 1382, letters patent from the king were directed to the heads of the university, condemning Wycliffe, his doctrines, and his followers, and suspending himself from all his official duties. His connexion with Oxford was thus dissolved. He was now old and infirm; and he still had his rectory, where he might live in peace and security, and where he might carry on his opposition to papal errors, and "preach Jesus Christ and him crucified." He seems not, therefore, to have opposed the royal will in suspending him from his academical duties: he consented to forsake that venerable place

where his youth had been spent, where truth had first shown to him her divine countenance, and where his triumphs over Anti-christ had been gained. He retired under the humble but elevating consciousness of not having laboured in vain, and of having been honoured to extend the knowledge of the gospel of Christ.

CHAPTER VII.

How he employed himself at Lutterworth—Writing, faithfully performing the duties of his sacred office, and resisting the dominion of Anti-Christ.—Summoned to appear before the Pope.—His Reply.—His Death and Character.—Progress of his opinion.

WHEN he retired to Lutterworth, he did not, though borne down by age and infirmity, relinquish the arduous work of reformation in which he had so long been engaged. On the contrary, he did not relax in this great work till the day of his death. He composed several treatises in his retirement, and in them he reiterated all the opinions he had previously enforced regarding the secular and worldly policy, and the doctrinal errors of the church of Rome. He felt a confidence which never failed him, that the holy Spirit of God would promote

the cause of truth and of godliness, that he would bless his own work, and that from partial and present evil he would ultimately educe good. "Truly aware I am," says he, "that the doctrine of the gospel may for a season be trampled under foot; that it may be overpowered in high places; and even suppressed by the threatenings of Anti-christ. But equally sure I am, that it shall never be extinguished; for it is the recording of truth itself, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but so shall not my words.'" He looked upon himself as a fellow-worker with Christ; and he was willing, therefore, both to labour and to suffer reproach, because he trusted in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe."

Nor did he spend his time in the composition of treatises for the more extended dissemination of his opinions. He laboured as faithfully in the vineyard as a parish minister, as if such duties had alone occupied his attention. He was ardently devoted to the discharge of the sacred functions, notwithstanding of the infirmities

which sickness and old age had brought upon him. He always showed himself ready to spend and be spent in the cause of his blessed Redeemer. "He watched in all things; he prayed without ceasing; he endured afflictions; he did the work of an evangelist; he was instant in season and out of season; he made full proof of his ministry; under the influence of the holy Spirit he laboured to win souls to Christ, who might be to him a crown of joy and rejoicing in the day of the Lord."

Meantime, while he was thus faithful and devout, he was again called to engage in the discussions of the church. We have already alluded to the disputed election of popes; and that two, Clement and Urban, violently urged their respective claims to the keys of St. Peter. France acknowledged the authority of the former; while England recognised that of the latter.—After spiritual weapons had failed, recourse was had to carnal warfare. And England was applied to, and consented to enter upon a crusade against France as the patron of the rival Pope. This unhappy state of

matters roused the holy indignation of Wycliffe, who endeavoured, though unsuccessfully, in two separate treatises, to open the eyes of his countrymen, and to check the unchristian warfare to which they were so improperly called. He condemns his superstitious and ambitious countrymen for availing themselves of the seal and banner of Christ, which is a token of peace, mercy, and charity, for the destruction of Christians, out of love to two false priests, who are open Anti-christ, who, to maintain their worldly state, are willing to oppress Christendom worse than ever the Jews of old did." "Why would not the proud priest of Rome grant full pardon to all men to live in peace, and charity, and patience, as he doth to all men to fight and slay their brethren?"

The Mendicants, his ancient enemies, had very warmly espoused the cause of Urban, whose claims England had recognised. Wycliffe renewed hostilities with them, both on the grounds on which he had formerly attacked them, and in consequence of the part they acted in regard to

the schism of the papacy. He treated them with that freedom and severity which he thought they deserved, and which they could not but feel. He "rebuked them sharply," probably hoping "that they might yet, through divine grace, be sound in the faith."

But such reforming zeal could not longer be displayed with impunity. It is not improbable, indeed, that ere this time he would have been exposed to imprisonment or death, had not the highest persons in the kingdom been favourable to him, and the Christian world been divided by the schism of the Popes. He knew that, even after his retirement to Lutterworth, the continuance of his personal liberty, or even of his life, was owing not to the inclination, but the weakness, of his enemies. Indeed he expected that ere he was called from the world, their power would be equal to their malice, and that he would be the victim of their cruelty. Yet he was not the less undaunted in enforcing truth and resisting error. "Let the blow fall," says he. "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 expect that the stroke will ere long descend. But my purpose is unalterable. I wait its coming."

That crisis seemed now arrived. Urban, incensed undoubtedly by the decided steps Wycliffe had recently taken in regard to the schism of the popedom, as well as by his former attacks on the papal church, summoned him to appear with all speed at Avignon and answer for his heresies. This obnoxious Reformer, when he received this citation, was labouring under that disease which soon terminated his days. He was unable to obey the summons; but the answer which he returned to it, and which was written under the impression that he was on the verge of the grave, is extremely solemn, interesting and characteristic. It may be regarded as the last legacy of this great and good man to the church and to the world.

* * * "If I might travel in my own person, I would, with God's will, go to the Pope. But Christ will needs have me go in a contrary direction; and he has taught

me that obedience is due rather to God than man. And I suppose that our Pope will not take the part of Anti-Christ, and oppose Christ in this, working against his holy will; for if he by himself, or by any of his servants, repeat this summons, against all reason, and go on unskilfully to pursue this citation, then he is open Anti-christ. And as merciful intentions did not excuse Peter from being by Christ called Satan, neither, by a far stronger consequence, will blind-intent and wicked counsel excuse the Pope in this matter; so that if he ask of true priests that they should travel, more than they may by reason of infirmity, there can be no reason given why we should not esteem him Anti-Christ: for our belief teaches us that our blessed God suffers us not to be tempted more than we may. How should a man ask such service? And therefore pray we to God for our Pope, Urban the Sixth, that his holy intentions be not quenched by his enemies. And Christ, that cannot lie, says that the enemies of a man be especially those of his own house-

hold; which saying holds true both of man and fiends."

Nor was the impression that death was so near unfounded. Though his characteristic ardour and boldness seemed unimpaired, he had long been sinking under a mortal disease, and was fast approaching his latter end. During his last days he availed himself of the assistance of a curate, who acted also in the capacity of his amanuensis; but he never himself discontinued his labours. On the contrary, he was employed in administering the holy sacrament of the supper when he was attacked by a palsy, a disease he had long been labouring under, and which now for the first time deprived him of speech and consciousness. This happened on the last day of December, 1384. He lingered for three days; when he breathed his last, and fell asleep in Jesus. This event took place in the sixtieth year of his age.

Thus lived and thus died John Wycliffe; "that Englishman," to use the words of Milton, "honoured of God to be the first preacher of a general Reformation to all Europe."

Of his personal appearance no very authentic account has been handed down to us. In figure, if we may judge from the pictures that remain of him, he appears to have been of a good height and commanding presence. His features were high; his eyes deep set, and shaded by thick eyebrows. He generally wore a plain dark russet gown, similar to that used by friars, and a doctor's cap on his head. His hair, towards the end of his life, was grey, and his beard, which was large and venerably white, flowed down upon his breast.

Of his works we have spoken frequently as we proceeded with our narrative. They are extremely numerous, insomuch that we are told that upwards of two hundred volumes, written by him, were at one time committed to the flames in Bohemia. They were almost all composed in Latin. About twelve of them have been printed; the remainder are still in manuscript, of which some are extremely rare; of others the title only is known. Some of them are solely doctrinal or practical, as his Exposition of the Decalogue: but the greater part are

polemical, and were meant to resist and expose the errors and corruptions, both theological and secular, of popery. They all do honour to him, both as a man of talents and learning, and as a Christian and Reformer; and under the divine blessing, they accomplished, in no small degree, the great object which they were meant to serve.*

Of his character we do not think it necessary to say much in addition to what we have stated in the course of our narrative. Our readers must already be well acquainted with it. It was eminently distinguished by great discrimination of judgment, by an inseparable opposition to whatever he looked upon as error, by as strong an adherence to what he conceived was truth, and by a disregard to every personal consideration, to every personal danger in condemning the one and in promoting the other. He rose far above the prejudices and superstition of his age. He inculcated the necessity of the exercise of private

* Various catalogues of his works have been given, but that by Vaughan is by far the most perfect and satisfactory.

judgment, and man's individual responsibility on the great day of accounts, and of a personal and saving acquaintance with that Book which alone "make wise unto salvation." In promoting those great objects,—in promoting the glory of God and triumph of true and undefiled religion, he was ready, nay, desirous to spend and to be spent. He had about him the spirit and characteristics of a Christian martyr. He lived even in daily expectation of martyrdom, and he was not unwilling, if such had been the divine determination, that his "blood should have been mingled with his sacrifices." His personal piety corresponded with his public profession; and he laboured most assiduously by prayer and dependence on divine aid, that while he tried to save others and to enlighten the world, he might not himself be a cast-away."

His learning was great. He was not only skilled in the canon and civil laws, and in the municipal law of England, but his theological attainments were far superior to his age. Every department of the Chris-

tian system he studied with equal ardour and success. To him, as before noticed, we owe the first translation of the Bible; and not only did he do this, but he advocated the right of the people to possess and read it in their own language.

Though Wycliffe was the first great advocate of the necessity of reformation, it was not his lot to bring about that great event. The age in which he lived was not sufficiently enlightened for that object to be accomplished. The errors and fascinations of popery were yet too deeply rooted to be fully eradicated by the efforts of one man, however great or assiduous these might be. But though not eradicated they were shaken; and the opinion, often repeated, is not unfounded, that, if Wycliffe had not lived, neither Huss nor Jerome, nor even Luther or Calvin might perhaps have been known. Though he was not himself very successful, he paved the way for success—of which others availed themselves in carrying to perfection the glorious work he had begun. He never, properly speaking, entirely withdrew from the faith

in which he had been educated; but he powerfully and perseveringly exposed almost all its heresies and corruptions. He stripped the Pope of all the imposing and factitious attributes which had been conferred upon him: he undermined the foundation on which the Roman hierarchy was placed, as it respected its head, its priests, its monastic orders, its secular pretensions, and its religious errors. No point escaped his reprehension; the invocation of saints—purgatory, and masses for the dead—the worship of images—auricular confession—the doctrines of indulgences—the celibacy of the clergy,—all these and almost every other error, however minute, by which the church of Rome was distinguished, he attacked and exposed. That he did not entirely forsake that corrupt and unscriptural church was partly owing to the age in which he was cast not being sufficiently enlightened to go along with him; and partly also, because, though he did detect and refute the errors in question, and though he saw what was wrong, he yet did not always set the truth in that clear light

which was necessary in order to effect a complete Reformation. The assertion, however, of Melanchthon, that Wycliffe was "ignorant of the righteousness of faith," is completely unfounded. That doctrine was his favourite theme, to which he delighted to refer, and on which all his hopes and principles were founded. The copious extracts we have given from his works fully warrant that view of the subject which we entertain: Nor indeed has the assertion of Melanchthon obtained the sanction of a single author competent to form an impartial judgment on the subject.

But though Wycliffe was allowed to die in peace, and his bones to be gathered to his fathers, the persecuting spirit which had pursued him during his life was not yet extinct. The famous council of Constance, which assembled in 1415, found that his doctrines were not only not eradicated, but were spreading, and had passed over from England to the continent. He was himself beyond the reach of their ecclesiastical thunder, and their love or their hatred. Yet they passed a resolution that

John Wycliffe had died an obstinate heretic; and they decreed that his memory should be pronounced infamous, and that his bones, if distinguishable from those of the faithful, should be raised from the grave where they had lain undisturbed for thirty years, to be cast on a dunghill at a distance from all Christian sepulchres. This barbarous and infamous revenge remained unexecuted for fourteen years, at the end of which time it was carried into effect. His body was disinterred; it was burnt to powder; and that no trace of it might remain, it was cast into the Swift, a small stream that washes the village of Lutterworth. About the same time also his writings were committed to the flames at Oxford, as well as on the continent, as if this could annihilate his labours, or stop the progress of truth.

But no such infamous proceedings could arrest the progress of the doctrines he had taught; it was indeed because these doctrines were prospering that such proceedings took place. The truth is, the gospel, from his time, and owing to his labours, be-

gan "to have free course and to be glorified." We have already seen that during his life, he enjoyed the patronage of some of the most distinguished persons, among whom were the Duke of Lancaster, and Ann of Bohemia, queen of Richard II.—and it is mentioned that before his death, one half of the nation had, in a greater or less degree, embraced his opinions. This happy state of things did not terminate at his decease. Notwithstanding violent measures adopted by the Russian church to put an end to them, the reformed doctrines continued to flourish and gain ground. They were imbibed and promoted by the most powerful families in the kingdom, and they made their way to the most remote provinces of it. Many were exposed to persecution, some even suffered martyrdom for their adhering to these doctrines, but the glorious cause in which they suffered spread and became triumphant. It extended its happy influences, not only to the sister kingdom of Scotland, but to various parts of the continent of Europe, particularly Bohemia; and, in the process of

time, the darkness of popery, through this means, was gradually expelled, and the doctrines of the gospel were introduced in all their purity and effulgence. Wycliffe, we repeat it, was a man "honoured of God to be the first preacher of a general Reformation to all Europe;" and his name deserves probably the highest place among those who, by their writings, their example, and their labours, have done most to promote the cause of the gospel, and the dearest interest of mankind, in the world.

APPENDIX.

SPECIMEN OF WYCLIFFE'S TRANSLATION.

AND the thridde day weddingis weren made in the Cane of Galilee, and the modir of Jhesus was there. And Jhesus was cleped, and hise disciplis to the weddingis. And whanne wijn failide, the modir of Jhesus seide to him, wei han not wijn. And Jhesus seide to hir, what to me and to thee, womman? Myn our cam not yit. Hise modir seith to the mynystris what euer thing he seye to you, do ye. And there weren set sixe stoonen cannes aftir the clensing of the Jewis, holdinge ech tweyne either thre metretis. And Jhesus seith to hem, fill ye up the pottis with water, and thei filliden hem up to the mouth. And Jhesus saide to hem, drawe ye now, and bere ye to the architriclyn, and thei baren. And whanne all the architriclyn hadde tastid the water maad wijn, and wiste not whereof it was, but the mynistris wisten that drawen the water, the architriclyn clepith the spouse, and seith to him, ech man settith first good wijn; and whanne men ben fillid, than that that is worse: but thou hast kept thi good wijn unto this tyme. Jhesus did this the bigynnyng of

signes in the Cane of Galilee, and schewide his glorie : and hise discipulis bileneden in him. † † John, chap. ii.

LOLLARDS.

“ Many writers are greatly mistaken concerning the origin of the term *Lollard*. Pope Gregory XI. (in a bull bearing date 1377, and sent to Oxford for the purpose of getting Wickliff given up to the custody of the Archbishop of Canterbury) laments that the university are so indolent as to suffer *tares* to spring up among the pure wheat of the illustrious field of their learned seminary. *Lolium inter perum triticum*. † † Hence, perhaps, the reason why our canonist Lyrwood says that the Lollards derived their name from the Latin word *Lolium*. Chaucer seems to have entertained a similar opinion (*Prol. to the Shipman's tale*). Others have asserted that the Lollards were so called from Walter Lollard. But here they have appropriated a name to an individual which was applied indifferently to various religious communities. Walter the Lollard was a German divine (a leader and champion of the Beghards; which word means a person remarkable for piety,) who was burnt as a heretic at Cologne in the year 1322. The probable and most satisfactory account of the origin of the term in question is to be found in Mosheim.” (*Baber's Memoirs of Dr. Wickliff*, 23-24). The opinion of Mosheim is as follows :

“ The term *Lollhard* or *Lullhard* (or as the ancient Germans wrote it, *Lollert*, *Lullert*) is compounded of the old German word *Lullen*, *Lollen*, *Lallen*, and the well-known termination *hard*. *Lollen* or *Lullen* signifies to sing with a low voice. It is yet used in the same sense among the English, who say *hull a-sleep*, which signifies to sing any one into a slumber with a sweet indistinct voice. The word is also used in the same sense among the Flemings, Swedes, and other nations. Among the Germans both the sense and pronunciation of it have undergone some alterations; for they say *Lallen*, which signifies to pronounce indistinctly, or stammer. *Lollard*, therefore, is a singer, or one who frequently sings. For as the word *Begger*, which universally signifies to request any thing fervently, is applied to devotional requests or prayer, and, in the stricter sense in which it is used by the Germans, denotes praying fervently to God; in the same manner the word *Lollen* is transferred from a common to a sacred song, and signifies, in its most limited sense, to sign a hymn. *Lollhard*, therefore, in the vulgar tongue of the ancient Germans, denotes a person who is continually praising God with a song, or signing hymns to his honour. ‘ In the same year’ (1309,) says the author of *Gesta Pontificum*, ‘ certain strolling hypocrites, who were called Lollards, or praisers of God, deceived some women of quality in Hainault and Brabant.’ Because those who praised God generally did it in verse, to praise God, in the

Latin style of the middle ages, meant to sing to him; and such as were frequently employed in acts of adoration, were called religious singers; and, as prayers and hymns are regarded as a certain external sign of piety towards God; those who aspired to a more than ordinary degree of piety and religion, and for that purpose were more frequently occupied in singing hymns than others, were called *Lollards*. Whereupon this word acquired the same meaning with the learned Beghard, which denoted a person remarkable for piety."—(*Ecclesiastical History*, III. 317-8. Lond. 1826.)

The Roman clergy and church being exasperated at such a class of people, and wishing to blacken their character as much as possible, converted the word *Lollard*, from being applied merely in a religious sense, into a term of reproach in other matters. It was applied to heresy, hypocrisy, and crime of every description. Hence, it was used in reference both to the early opponents to popery on the continent, and to the followers of Wycliffe in England. (*Vide ut supra.*)

FINIS.

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