



JOHN WICLIF.

THE LIFE AND WORK
OF
JOHN WICLIF.

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P R E F A C E .

AS this little book is intended for popular reading, the Author has not thought it advisable to give references to authorities. But he wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the following works, which he has freely consulted in the preparation of this volume :—“ History of John Wiclif,” by John Lewis ; “ Life of Wiclif,” by Le Bas ; “ The Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe,” by Robert Vaughan ; “ John de Wycliffe, a Monograph,” by Robert Vaughan, D.D. ; “ John Wiclif and his English Precursors,” by Professor Lechler, D.D., translated by Peter Lorimer, D.D. ; “ Apologie for Wickliffe,” by T. James, D.D. ; “ Wicklif’s English Bible,” by Rev. Josiah Forshall and Sir F. Madden ; “ Three Treatises by John Wiclif, D.D.,” edited by J. H. Todd, D.D. ; “ Fasciculi Zizaniorum,” edited by Professor Shirley ; “ Select English Works of Wicklif,” edited by T. Arnold ; “ English Works of Wyclif,” edited by F. D. Matthew ; “ Acts and Monuments, etc.,” by John Foxe ; “ History of Latin Christianity,” by Dean Milman ; “ Wicklif’s Place in History,” by Professor Montagu Burrows ; “ Joannis Wiclif Trialogus,” by Dr. Lechler ; “ John Wiclif’s Polemical Works in Latin,” by Dr. Rudolf Buddensieg ; and “ Hus und Wiclif,” von Dr. J. Loserth.

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THE LIFE OF WICLIF.

CHAPTER. I

ENGLAND IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

IT has been the splendid fortune of England to stand in the fore-front of that great and protracted battle for liberty which has been the movement of supreme interest in the history of modern Europe. With regard to the *political* aspect of that struggle, the leadership of this nation is not questioned. But England is not so generally credited with having been in the van of that warfare which brought about *religious* emancipation. If attention is directed to the sixteenth century, the religious reformation in this country seems a somewhat ignoble part and consequence of the great movement which was headed by the imposing figure of Luther, and which took grandest proportions upon the broad field of Germany. Thus the enfranchisement of modern intellect and society from the bondage of Rome has

been usually attributed to Continental, and mainly to German, influences. But in our day history is studied with a command of ampler materials than formerly, and upon more philosophical principles. We are now taught to look to remoter times, and perhaps to half-forgotten men, for the origin of great religious and social movements. The rebellion against Rome took its rise long before the Reformation century. And it is now known that the most significant of the early uprisings against the intellectual and spiritual supremacy of Rome took place in the fourteenth century, and in this our England.

Throughout the middle ages the nations of Europe acknowledged the vast claims of the Papacy to an almost absolute dominion. Rome undoubtedly conferred great benefits upon the

peoples whose beliefs and practices she largely governed; yet she compelled the payment in compensation of an enormous price,—the subjection to her lordship of individual, family, and social life. The assumptions of the head of the Church, however unbecoming to the professed successor of the fisherman of Galilee, were generally admitted. The haughtiness of the Roman prelates was endured, sometimes patiently, sometimes impatiently. The authority of the priesthood was boldly exercised, and was, for the most part, respected; it touched human life at almost every point. Between the secular and regular clergy, *i.e.*, between the parish priests and the monks, there was constant rivalry. The sloth, and even the follies and vices, too prevalent among the monastic orders, were regarded with comparative indifference, or were, on the part of the bold and independent, the theme of satire; they were compensated by occasional gleams of learning, by general hospitality, by not infrequent piety. The observances and usages which had grown to be part of Catholic Christianity were regarded very much as the laws of nature; and the sacraments, as the recognized means of salvation, were encompassed with a halo rather of superstition than of sanctity. The religion of the New Testament had, in the course of centuries, been overlaid

with additions of human invention; and the simple policy of the primitive congregations had disappeared, to give place to a vast system of hierarchical authority, and of complicated ceremonialism. The Church was an institution, penetrating all ranks of society, interfering with all natural and civil relations, imposing its laws upon all spiritual natures, crushing out independence of thought and of action by a machinery which no human power could escape, and no human wisdom could reverse.

It was not consistent with the decrees of Providence, or with the progress of mankind, that the supremacy of the Church, as a human institution, should last for ever. National life needed to be emancipated from Papal avarice, Papal tyranny, Papal interference. Social life wanted a purer, freer atmosphere than could be breathed in the ages of Papal domination. Thought had to be emancipated, and humanity allowed a less restrained, a more intellectual and liberal development. A revolution was inevitable; and the uprising of the human mind against mediæval ecclesiasticism is the greatest revolution which the Christian centuries have witnessed. The Renaissance of literature, of art, of physical and philosophical knowledge, was doubtless part of the same movement. But the *spiritual* transition was the

deepest and the most influential. Now the deep-seated causes of vital changes are often hard to find; yet the facts which mark their growth lie upon the surface. The lonely thinker is affected, perhaps unconsciously, by the spirit of his age; but he in turn communicates to his age an impulse which may become a master-power. The thoughts and visions which at first are regarded with suspicion or aversion, may after a while be welcomed with enthusiasm; and the name which in one age is greeted with derision or with hate, in the next may become the watchword of a church or of a nation.

Even during what are called "the dark ages," the spiritual empire of Rome over the West was not absolute or universal. Not only did individuals dare to think independently; religious sects and communities existed, flourished, and spread, which were in rebellion against Papal doctrine and practice. The Paulicians, a sect which in the seventh and following centuries revolted against Papal authority, spread rapidly and widely throughout Europe. Their heterodoxy upon the person of Christ, and upon the respect due to the Old Testament, was consistent with the rejection of many serious errors adopted by Rome. The Cathari by their very name professed a purity not to be found in the Catholic community. The Albigenses, and still more

decidedly the Waldenses, were singularly free from many of the unscriptural dogmas and superstitious observances of Rome, and incurred the fierce hatred of persecuting popes. These and other less known sects were the Protestants of "the dark ages." For these and such as these the Church had no tolerance. Yet the Church was wise enough to permit a certain amount of liberty, where there was no design of carrying independence beyond the library and the cloister, and where outward, verbal submission was rendered to the authority of popes and councils.

And amongst those who remained in the bosom of the Church, and who were accounted her beloved sons, not a few were as fully alive as the Reformers who came after them to the iniquities of the Papal Court, and to the corruptions of the Papal Church. It has often been observed that nowhere in literature is there to be found a more scathing exposure of the abuses of the Papacy than Dante made in his great poem written at the beginning of that fourteenth century the latter part of which was signalized by the protests of the English Wiclif, and of the Lollards, and of the Bohemians.

It must not be supposed that no Englishman prior to Wiclif raised a voice against the prevalent corruptions of the Papal system, and in favour of

the purer and more scriptural conduct of Church affairs. It was very much to their credit that eminent clerics protested vigorously, and not without effect, against prevailing corruption. In the thirteenth century, Grossetête made a mark at Oxford by his lectures and writings upon philosophy and theology. He received several preferments, and was, in 1235, advanced to the Bishopric of Lincoln. In this position he displayed great vigour in the reformation of abuses. He attributed the prevalence of sin and irreligion largely to the selfishness and negligence of the clergy, and, when necessary, used his episcopal authority to remove scandalous abbots from their monasteries and worthless priests from their benefices. He encouraged the preaching of the Word of God, both by the secular clergy and by the mendicant friars. He even urged the Pope to reform the Roman Curia, and he urged the English Parliament to resist the unjust encroachments of the Apostolic See.

Another precursor of Wiclif was Richard Fitzralph, also an Oxford man, who, in 1333, became Chancellor of his university, and, in 1347, Archbishop of Armagh, and who is known, by the designation of his see, as *Armachanus*. He was a scholar and a theologian, but is remembered in Church history as an outspoken and

vigorous opponent of the mendicant friars. Doubtless these orders, protected and defended by Grossetête, had since his time become corrupt. They were especially blamed for taking confession out of the hands of the parish priests, the men most competent for this office, and for inveigling into their ranks young students not yet arrived at years of discretion.

It seems probable that, when an Oxford student, Wiclif may have been brought into contact with Fitzralph, and may have imbibed from this distinguished Churchman the spirit of independence and the habit of fearlessly exposing abuses and scandals.

Another great Oxford name of this century is that of Thomas Bradwardine, who was one of the most famous theologians of his age, and was especially remarkable as the opponent of prevalent Pelagianism, and the champion of the doctrines of grace. He was denominated "the profound doctor," and gained and justified this title by a learned and argumentative work, "Of the cause of God." Himself a truly spiritual man, he did much to elucidate and diffuse evangelical views of Christian truth. His life was a very varied one: he was Doctor of Theology at Oxford, afterwards Chancellor of St. Paul's in London, and then for several years war-chaplain and confessor to Edward III., in which capacity he

accompanied the king upon several campaigns. For a few weeks in the summer of 1349, Bradwardine was Archbishop of Canterbury. In this position he might have rendered great service to the cause of religion; but Providence did not permit him this opportunity; he died at Lambeth Palace on the 26th of August, 1349.

It is considered scarcely likely that Wiclif, when a student at Oxford, had any personal knowledge of Bradwardine, who was probably at that time absent with the king upon his campaigns. But the influence of so able and spiritual a theologian could hardly be lost upon an inquiring and pure mind like that of Wiclif. Doubtless an impulse to liberty of thought and a tendency towards Church reform were thus communicated to the more candid and spiritual among the youth of the university. And, indeed, there was abroad in the country generally a spirit of discontent with the state of religion, and especially with the conduct of the clergy.

There is no more conclusive proof of the unsettled state of religious feeling in England during the fourteenth century, and of the dissatisfaction felt with the religious guides and the religious habits and practices of the time, than is afforded by the poem of William Langland, known as *Piers the Ploughman*. The author is believed

to have been a plain priest, living on the Malvern Hills; his sympathies were with the husbandmen and the working people; and he complained of the formality and hollowness which distinguished the ministers of the Church and their ministrations calling upon the people to listen to the voice of reason and of conscience. There is in this poem no disparagement or questioning of the Church's doctrines; it is the practices of Churchmen that the poet censures; it is for righteousness, humility, and benevolence that he calls aloud. The national discontent which this singular allegorical composition so remarkably reveals, doubtless prepared the way for the outspoken denunciations of ecclesiastical corruptions which were so soon to proceed from the lips and the pen of our great English Reformer.

The first blow for religious freedom, —the blow which was the earnest of the great battle of the Reformation,—the blow which resounded throughout Europe and adown the centuries, was struck towards the close of the fourteenth century. The hand that struck that blow was the hand of JOHN WICLIF, a man of true heroic mould, whose character and life-work would alone have distinguished and immortalized the country which called him her son, though in fact he is but one of those

illustrious men whom Britain has nurtured into greatness, and who in return have crowned her with the wreath of deathless fame. It is certainly one of the remarkable facts of history, that the great struggle for spiritual and ecclesiastical liberty should have commenced in England, a country which had been deemed "the peculiar garden of the Papacy," which was praised alike for its loyalty and its liberality to Rome.

The reign of Edward III., extending over half a century, was one of the greatest in the annals of England. The king's victories in both France and Scotland, his personal prowess and the heroic valour of the Black Prince, gratified the proud, daring, and imperious spirit of the people. The English nation became conscious of its own strength, and of the qualities which have since raised it to a commanding and influential position in the European comity of nations. It has often been observed that periods of national vigour, enterprise, and success have been periods in which national life has put forth many and various signs of activity and energy. New outlets are found for the rush of increased vitality.

We are justified in believing that the literary spring-tide, the social uprising, and the religious revival which distinguished the second half of the fourteenth century, were all to a large

extent the fruit of the fuller and richer life of the English people.

The Commons no doubt suffered sorely from the great pestilence of 1348-9, from the sanguinary wars, the burdensome taxation, and the cruel oppression of the time. The outbreak of the Boors, which took place in the reign of Richard II., was a symptom both of popular discontent and of popular independence and consciousness of power. The weight and influence wielded by the Commons in the State grew through the frequency with which the necessities of Edward III. compelled him to summon Parliaments for the purpose of raising supplies by which to carry on his foreign wars. Some concession to popular feeling, or some confirmation of popular rights, was a usual condition of liberality.

Of the arts, architecture seems to have flourished most notably in this reign. Under the famous and large-minded William of Wykeham, Windsor Castle arose on the banks of the lordly Thames. The period was that of the decorated Gothic of which our cathedrals and churches present many magnificent and beautiful examples. Several of the colleges at Oxford were founded in the fourteenth century, and parts of New and Merton Colleges are assigned to that early date. New College owes its foundation to the munificence of William of Wykeham.

The same age witnessed the full and final union of Saxon and Norman elements in the English nation, and the full and final prevalence of the English speech, however modified by the foreign influences and vocabulary. Hence the fact that our language and literature, in their modern and to us their popularly intelligible development, date from the second half of the fourteenth century. The national spirit found its outlet in the bold and democratic and popular writings of Langland, in the courtly style and yet thoroughly English genius of Geoffrey Chaucer, and even more distinctly and powerfully in the English Bible and the religious writings of John Wiclif.

The age, which was an age of strength to England, was an age of weakness to the Papacy. The fourteenth century witnessed the great schism of the West, one of the most remarkable events in the long and eventful history of the Roman Church. Early in this century (1305), the seat of the Popedom was removed from Rome to Avignon, where the chief bishop exercised his authority, virtually under the patronage of the King of France. As France was frequently at war with England, the position of the successive popes was not favourable to their influence in this

country. When three-fourths of the century had run its course, the schism occurred, and from that time until the assembling of the Council of Constance (*i.e.* from 1375 to 1414), the allegiance of the Catholic world was divided between an Italian and a Transalpine pope. This division was of necessity a source of weakness to the Church. It cannot be supposed that Wiclif was singular in the bold view he took of ecclesiastical affairs; the faith of many must have been shaken, first in the unity of the Roman communion, and then in the authority of its Papal head.

In fact, although the revival of learning in Europe was deferred for another century, the student of history is aware that the age in which Wiclif lived and laboured was a period of awakening from the slumber of generations. In politics, in arms, in arts, in literature, the fourteenth century produced great men. But of these Wiclif, judged by the standard of breadth and duration of influence, was the greatest; it would not be easy, applying the standard of intellectual power, to point out any who could be ranked along with the English reformer. The man was worthy of his country and of his age; and his age and country were not altogether unworthy of him.

CHAPTER II.

WICLIF'S YOUTH AND EDUCATION AT OXFORD.

ABOUT the year 1320, in the neighbourhood of Richmond in North Yorkshire, perhaps in the parish of Wiclif, or Wycliffe,* was born the great man whose deeds and writings have made the name of his family seat and home familiar to Englishmen as a household word. In the rectory of that secluded parish, on the banks of the winding Tees, is still preserved, as an heirloom, a portrait, deemed authentic, though, of course, not original, of the features of the Reformer; it has been attributed to Sir Antonio More. The parish church still stands in which the Wiclifs worshipped. It was a family living, as appears from the fact that in the fourteenth century one Wiclif presented another Wiclif to the rectory. It is remarkable that many of the parishioners still adhere to the old religion, and attend the Roman Catholic chapel. Of the manor-house, where the most illustrious of the race

of Wiclifs may have passed his childhood, little or nothing now remains.

It was in those days the custom for youths devoted to a life of learning and to the service of the Church to repair to the university at a very early age. When fifteen, John Wiclif may have left his father's roof for Oxford, and there is no reason to believe that he ever again beheld the haunts of his boyhood in remote, secluded Teesdale.

Oxford was at this time the foremost and most famous of the universities of Europe. It is said upon good authority that before the Great Plague of 1348, there were no fewer than 30,000 students at Oxford. Before the invention of printing, when books were scarce and dear, the universities occupied a more important position as places of education than they do in our times. Every grade of scholarship and of ignorance must have co-existed side by side among the multitudes of youth who came together in such a seat of learning as Oxford. The means of education abounded in the books

* The name, Dr. Lorimer asserts, is found spelt in twenty-eight different ways, of which the shortest and simplest is one of the oldest.

and lectures accessible to the students. The colleges were not the all-important element in university life which they have since become. There were great ecclesiastical and monastic foundations at Oxford; and there were hostels and foundations for the accommodation of poor students, many of whom were devoted to the service of the Church. Intellectual interests and ambitions were not wanting; and disputations were, it is well known, characteristic of the mediæval academic life. The great names of Occam and of Bradwardine still tower above their contemporaries in the retrospect of the historian; and Occam and Bradwardine were Oxford men, who still lived during the earlier part of Wiclif's university career.

The *curriculum* at Oxford in the fourteenth century was very different from that which is considered sufficient and satisfactory in our busy, driving age. It was both longer in time and wider in range. Four years were passed in the verbal studies of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, after which the student took his degree as Bachelor. Three years were then devoted to the cultivation of sciences, such as arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, and these years led up to the dignity attaching to the *Artium Magister*. The student of divinity then devoted seven years to theological studies, after which, as Bachelor of Theology, he

was allowed to lecture on the *Sentences*. For three years afterwards he would study the Bible, and lecture on a canonical book, and then would come entitled to his Doctorate of Theology. It appears that seventeen years would thus be spent in study; if the youth entered the university at fifteen, he might, by continuous application, rise, when thirty-two, to the honourable distinction of D.D.!

Much uncertainty attaches to Wiclif's connection with the colleges at Oxford. It was formerly believed that he was a member of Queen's College, soon after its foundation by Queen Philippa, and that he afterwards removed to Merton, the college of Bradwardine and of Occam, and perhaps of the still more famous Duns Scotus. There is no question that he was afterwards a member of Balliol College, and it has recently been contended that in all probability he was, throughout his university career, a Balliol man. In support of this it has been remarked that whilst Merton was especially the college of the Southerners, Balliol was chiefly frequented by students from the Northern counties. However this may be, it is certain that Oxford was his chief place of residence and of intellectual labour from about 1335 until within about three years of his death.

At the university John Wiclif pur-

sued with ability, industry, and success the studies which were cultivated in his age. He became a good Latin scholar, although his Latin is scholastic rather than classical, and often follows the English idiom. It was in the philosophy and the logic of the schoolmen, however, that Wiclif chiefly excelled. "He was acknowledged to be a consummate master in the dialectics of the Schools: he was the pride as well as the terror of Oxford" (Milman). In fact, Wiclif is now acknowledged by the highest historical authorities to be one of the very greatest men of the fourteenth century, both in ability and in learning. Here is testimony borne to Wiclif's scholarship by Knighton, a hater alike of his doctrines and of himself:—"He was the most eminent doctor of theology who lived in that age. In philosophy he was held second to none, in scholastic learning altogether incomparable. It was his highest ambition to go beyond the intellects of other men, by the subtlety of his knowledge and the depth of his genius, and to dissent from their opinions."

In addition to the ordinary academical acquirements, Wiclif obtained a thorough knowledge of the canon law, and possibly some insight into civil and common law,—knowledge which proved of great use to him in the controversial writings which he issued in later life, as well as in political negotia-

tions and ecclesiastical diplomacy. Nor was the learning of this great scholar circumscribed within these bounds. He was a diligent reader of the greatest of the so-called "Fathers" of the early Church. And, above all, he was a most careful and assiduous student of Holy Scripture, which he read in the Latin Vulgate, and with which he became extraordinarily familiar, as is evident from the use he makes of the text of the Bible in his homiletical and controversial writings.

It may help us to realise the position and the avocations of Wiclif, when a student at the university, if we recall the description of the "Clerk of Oxenford," which has come down to us from the pen of the great recorder of the manners of that age, Geoffrey Chaucer. Doubtless among the thousands of students who resorted to Oxford, there were young men of every variety of character, tastes, and occupations, and Chaucer has limned, with his incomparable pencil, the mental features of scholars of another order than the teller of the "woes and the virtues of patient Grissel." However, some traits of the following picture may well be believed to correspond with the character and habits of the keen and studious young Yorkshireman, who was becoming the pride of his *alma mater*:—

"A clerk there was of Oxenford also,
That unto logic hadde long i-go.

Al so lene was his hors as is a rake,
And he was not right fat, I undertake ;
But looked holwe, and thereto soberly.
Full thredbare was his overest courtepy,
For he hadde nought gotten him yit a benefice,
He was not worthy to haven an office.
For him was lever have at his beddes heed
Twenty bookes, clothed in blak and reed,
Of Aristotil and of his philosophre,
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre ;

But al that he might of his frendes hente,
On bookes and his lernyng he it spent,
And busily gan for the soules pray
Of hem that gaf him wherewith to scolay,
Of studye tooke he most cure and heede.
Not oo word spak he more than was neede,
All that he spak, it was of hey prudence,
And schort and quyk, and ful of gret sentence,
Sownynge in moral manere was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche."



CHAPTER III.

WICLIF'S POSITION AND INFLUENCE IN THE UNIVERSITY.

A MAN of Wiclif's natural powers of intellect could not but profit by the opportunities afforded by a residence of many years at Oxford, and could not but rise to eminence and honour in a great seat of learning. All that the university could give, Wiclif certainly acquired. And he amply repaid the debt he thus incurred. Both by his personal teaching and influence, and by his great literary and religious services to his country, he brought credit and fame to his *alma mater*.

Wiclif was at Oxford first a learner, and then a teacher. As there is usually little that is eventful in a professorial life, which consists in a daily routine of writing or lecturing, and in an insensible influence over many youthful minds, it is not to be expected that much can be said upon this part of Wiclif's career. He taught, first in logic and metaphysics, and afterwards in doctrinal and biblical theology.

Wiclif wrote several logical and metaphysical works, and the compo-

sition of these may confidently be referred to the years preceding his appointment to the mastership of Balliol and his presentation to his college living. There is, indeed, no doubt that these treatises contain the substance of his disputations and prelections at Oxford when he was studying and teaching in the university as Master of Arts. No fewer than eleven works on philosophical and logical subjects are known to the students of Wiclif's writings. Their titles are given by Shirley; some are upon the science of logic, and others treat of psychological subjects, as The Soul, or of metaphysical questions, as of Universals, of Matter and Form, etc. Not only did Wiclif's philosophical studies sharpen his naturally acute intellect; the connection between metaphysics and scholastic theology was of the closest. The great scholar and thinker was only stepping to a higher stage of the same platform when he gave himself, as he came to do, to the study of Divinity.

The year in which Wiclif received

the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and became consequently a professor and teacher of theology, cannot certainly be fixed. It has been put as early as 1363 and as late as 1372, but the former date is more likely to be near the mark. He had before been termed *magister*; he was now *doctor*. And in virtue of this degree, he had a right to teach Divinity in his university, though he had no settled and salaried position such as we understand to be implied in the appellation "professor." The language of quaint old Fuller upon Wiclif's position at this time deserves to be quoted for its shrewd sagacity:— "For seven years Wiclif lived at Oxford in some tolerable quiet, having a professor's place and a cure of souls; on the week-days, in the schools, proving to the learned what he meant to preach; and on the Lord's Day preaching in the pulpit to the vulgar what he had proved before. Not unlike those builders in the second temple, holding a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other; his disputing making his preaching to be strong, and his preaching making his definitions to be plain."

If Wiclif became Doctor of Divinity in 1363, it is not improbable that about the same time he displayed that independence of religious thinking which so signally distinguished him all the rest of his life. It does not appear

that before this date he was known as entertaining "heretical" views. And it was many years before independence and freedom of thinking led him to revolt openly and formally against the established doctrines of the Church. It seems impossible to decide to what extent his great theological works were composed during the Oxford residence; but there can be no doubt that the foundation of his theological learning was then laid, and that his distinctive views of truth, apart from later controversies, e.g. on Transubstantiation, must be dated from this period.

It is not easy to trace the course of Wiclif as he passed from one position at Oxford to another. It has been usually believed that in 1356 he was seneschal of Merton College, but this is open to question. There is, however, positive evidence that he was the head of two colleges successively, though in each case but for a short period.

In the year 1360, Wiclif was appointed Warden or Master of Balliol College, an appointment which was a high compliment to his abilities and learning, for he was yet but about forty years of age.

A somewhat obscure episode in Wiclif's life is his connection with Canterbury Hall. This was a college founded at Oxford by Islip, Archbishop of Canterbury. The original warden, a monk named Woodhull, was deposed

by the founder; and Wiclif, in the year 1365, accepted the vacant position. There has been much controversy as to whether it was our Wiclif, or another person with a similar name, who was thus appointed, but it seems now satisfactorily established that the Warden of Canterbury was none other than the reformer. On the death of Islip, Woodhull contested the position with his successor, first before the metropolitan, and then before the pope. The litigation did not come to an end until 1370. The displaced warden made use of interest and bribes, and the Court of Rome could not be expected to look favourably upon the cause of one who in the meantime had become a champion of England against the Papacy. The decision was given in favour of Woodhull, who accordingly reigned in Wiclif's stead. There is no proof that the reformer was irritated by his disappointment; yet the whole process must have enlightened him still further as to the corruption which prevailed at Rome.

It is known that first in 1363, and in several years subsequently, Wiclif rented rooms at Queen's College, from which it seems evident that he was, after his resignation of the Headship of Balliol, and when not presiding over Canterbury Hall, in an independent position, engaged in his own scholastic studies and his educational work,

rather than occupied in collegiate business.

It is not known in what year Wiclif took orders, but in 1361 he was presented by the masters and scholars of Balliol Hall to the living of Fylingham in Lincolnshire. He probably resided in his parish only at intervals, and engaged a substitute, who acted during his long periods of absence; for we find him obtaining permission to reside at Oxford, and to be absent from his parish for the space of two years.

In 1368 he exchanged this living for that of Ludgershall, in Buckinghamshire, which, being near Oxford, was more convenient to his work at the university. This combination of professorial and pastoral duties does not seem to have been injurious to his usefulness in either avocation. There was a marked difference between his scholastic and his popular styles. "His Latin is dry, argumentative, syllogistic, abstruse, obscure, his English rude, coarse, but clear, emphatic, brief, vehement, with short, stinging sentences, and perpetual hard antithesis" (Milman).

It is certain that Wiclif inherited the influence of the greatest among the thinkers and reformers who preceded him at Oxford, and that he was heartily in sympathy with all that was with most that was fresh and independent in the university. Through inter-

course with great minds, and by his own vigorous thinking, he came to question the consistency between the Scriptural and the mediæval conceptions of the Divine kingdom upon earth. Hence his radical divergence, as a theologian, from the established order of things, both doctrinal and practical. Popery was a system which relied much upon human merit, and this must be borne in mind when we try to understand the Augustinian tendencies of most of the reformers, who aimed at exalting above all that is human the infinite grace and mercy of the Eternal. In the sixteenth

century, Luther and Calvin were conspicuous for their advocacy of what has since been known as Calvinism in doctrine. So in the fourteenth century Wiclif was a strenuous upholder of the grace of God. It has been said that he probably got his predestination from Bradwardine, his doctrine of "Dominion" from FitzRalph, and from Ockham his advocacy of priestly poverty (Matthew).

It must be borne in mind that Wiclif's close and intimate connection with Oxford, though occasionally interrupted, did not cease until 1381.



CHAPTER IV.

WICLIF AS A PATRIOT—HIS OPPOSITION TO PAPAL ENCROACHMENTS AND MISSION TO BRUGES.

IT was not merely within the university, and by means of theological reasoning, that Wiclif was to become famous and powerful. The events of the time were such as gave an able, learned, and fearless Englishman an opportunity of serving the State and of commending and endearing himself to his countrymen. It was upon the political side that the Oxford scholar first touched upon religious controversy. Indeed, for some years after his first interposition in ecclesiastico-political affairs, he does not seem to have concerned himself in theological disputations, or to have advocated theological reforms. It was as a patriotic Englishman and a loyal subject that Wiclif first took up a position in which he drew to himself the regard of his fellow-countrymen. And having taken up an attitude of antagonism towards Rome upon questions of policy, of government, and of finance, his open and fearless mind was led on to examine matters of far deeper and less

temporary importance. Thus from protesting against Papal avarice and selfish ambition, he advanced to the exposure of errors and of practices which, as a part of the system of ecclesiastical domination, were the growth of successive centuries.

Early in the thirteenth century, the base King John had consented to the demand of Innocent III. that the kings of England should hold the crown in feudal dependence upon the Holy See, and should pay in acknowledgment a yearly tribute of a thousand marks to the Pope as suzerain.* In the year 1365, when this tribute had not been paid for thirty-three years, Pope Urban was so ill-advised as to renew the demand, and to threaten, if it were disregarded, to summon Edward before himself as feudal superior to answer for the default. A more unwise proceeding the Pope could not have

* This tribute had been paid by Henry III. and Edward II., but had been withheld by the first and third Edwards.

adopted. This nation was too willing to be fleeced by Papal agents, and to suffer Papal tampering with benefices. But it was quite another thing to tolerate a claim to political superiority—for an English sovereign to do homage to a foreign prince for his royal crown. The national pride was touched and the national spirit was roused. The Parliament, to whom Edward referred the demand of the Pope, at once repudiated and refused it, and disclaimed the asserted authority. An anonymous monk, vexed at the decision, published a vindication of the claim urged by the Papal See, in which he called upon Wiclif, already known as an authority upon civil and canon law, to defend, if he could, the conduct of the Crown and the Parliament. Wiclif took up the challenge, and, in reply to his assailant, wrote (in 1367) a pamphlet, in which he set forth the unrighteousness and absurdity of the claim, both by arguments of his own, and by reasonings put into the mouth of certain fearless and independent lords represented as speaking in their places in Parliament. It has been inferred from this treatise that Wiclif himself possessed a seat in this Parliament, but the grounds seem insufficient to support such an inference. It is, however, evident that the writer was well acquainted with the chief statesmen and politicians of his day, and

with their method of regarding public questions. The incident certainly proves, that at the time in question the Oxford priest and scholar was known in political quarters as a man able and zealous to maintain the rights of his country against the encroachments of the Papal Court.

The defence of English rights now referred to seems to have been the first public action taken by Wiclif against Rome. But it was sufficient to bring him into notice and into favour, and to mark him in the view of his fellow-countrymen as a bold and powerful champion of national rights. Events and incidents soon occurred which gave Wiclif fresh opportunity for resisting the injustice and rapacity of Rome.

In the long controversy between the English Government and the Roman See, with respect to Papal invasions of the rights of the English laity, certain statutes must be noted as important landmarks. It is quite in accordance with the national character that, whilst for the most part the dogmas of the Church should have been generally and unquestioningly accepted, and whilst large contributions should have been on the whole uncomplainingly paid, umbrage was nevertheless taken at measures and practices which derogated from the dignity and independence of the realm and of the

courts of this country. It is certainly a noteworthy proof of the independence and determination of English kings and parliaments that Acts were passed with a view to restrict and restrain Papal proceedings in this kingdom. The famous Statute of Provisors was enacted and re-enacted; it imposed severe penalties upon such as should fill up church-offices to the injury of the legal rights of the king, or of chapters or private patrons. The Statute of Præmunire was enacted in order to preserve the jurisdiction of the King's courts; it imposed penalties upon any subject who should make an appeal from the decisions of the English courts of law to the Supreme Pontiff. These Acts were intended to uphold the civil dominion of the king and his judges against the encroachments of Rome, and show both how customary it was for the representatives of the Papacy to set up claims inconsistent with national independence, and how resolved the English nation was to resist all claims of the kind.

The traveller in Belgium, who visits the cities of Flanders with any taste for antiquities, with any historical delight in the associations of bygone centuries, is wont to linger in the half-deserted side-streets, by the quiet canals, in the spacious market-place of Bruges with a peculiar interest. its picturesque belfry, its gorgeous

churches, its quaint hospital of St. John, with the incomparable specimens it holds of early Flemish art, cannot but make a deep impression upon a susceptible imagination. The city recalls many stirring and stormy scenes of other days; but to the Englishman it has few memories connected with it of greater interest and charm than those that gather round the residence of John Wiclif within those walls in the summer of 1374. Negotiations were proceeding in Bruges between embassies from France and from England, with a view to peace between the two nations; and in the English embassy were John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the King's third son, the Earl of Salisbury, and Sudbury, Bishop of London. At the same time and in the same city representatives of the Papal See met a commission from the English Court to treat upon grievances of which Edward's Government had long complained, but to little purpose. In this commission was John Wiclif, who is named second after Gilbert, Bishop of Bangor.

Among the many encroachments of Rome upon the rights of Englishmen, none was more offensive than her frequent interference with the privileges of lay-patrons. Whilst it was admitted that the Pope should have a voice in the nomination of English archbishops, ancient custom vested in the king and

in the nobles and gentry of the land the privilege of appointing to all other ecclesiastical offices and benefices. But the Pope had been in the habit of frequently invading the rights of patrons by issuing what were called *Provisors*, instruments by which he filled up, according to his own pleasure, such vacant benefices as he chose to appropriate. These nominations were all the more disliked because the persons appointed were often most unsuitable, —sometimes foreigners ignorant of the English language, who never even visited their benefices; sometimes mere boys, quite incapable of fulfilling ecclesiastical duties.

Like other grievances of a somewhat similar kind, this came under the cognizance of the English Parliament, and Statutes of Provisors, to remedy the evil, had been passed before the time with which we are now dealing. The Pope's policy was to evade or to resist all statutes of this nature. It was in consequence of the dissatisfaction of Parliament with the proceedings of the Pope that a conference had already been held, and it was because this conference had issued in no good result that the Commission was appointed, upon which Wiclif served, in 1374.

The advantages to the champion of English independence accruing from this appointment were manifest. The

horizon of his knowledge must have been immensely widened by a sojourn of two months in one of the most flourishing and opulent cities of Europe, and by intercourse with political and ecclesiastical personages of more or less distinction and power, representing the great nationalities of Europe. He could not fail to find material for a juster estimate of the tortuous ways of Roman policy. And above all he cemented a friendship with John of Gaunt, the most powerful of English nobles and princes, and the man who was most able to protect him in a course that was sure to bring him into conflict with ecclesiastical authority. The political conference at Bruges issued in no result, and that with the representatives of the Pope was not much more satisfactory. After the interval of a year, Gregory XI. issued bulls which "amounted in effect to this,—To recognise accomplished facts, and to leave the *status quo* untouched. Whosoever was in actual possession of a church living in England should no longer have his right of incumbency challenged on the side of the Curia; whosoever had had his right to a church office disputed by Urban V. should no longer have his confirmation in the office *reserved*; benefices which the same Pope had already reserved, in the event of a vacancy, should, in so far as they had not already become

vacant, be filled up by the patrons themselves; and all annates or first-fruits not yet paid should be remitted. In addition, it was conceded that the Church revenues of several cardinals who held prebends in England should be subject to impost, to cover the cost of the restoration of churches which the holders had allowed to fall into ruin" (Lechler). With regard to future action certain concessions were to be made on both sides. But, on the whole, no great progress seems to have been made.

Facts make it evident that whilst the Bishop of Bangor did not, by his conduct in these negotiations, lose favour with the Pope, Wiclif, on the other hand, advanced in the esteem and confidence of the English Court. Gilbert was promoted by the Pope to the more important and valuable See of Hereford; and Wiclif was presented by the Crown to the Prebend of Aust in addition to the living of Lutterworth, to which he was appointed in April 1374. He received no higher appointment to the day of his death.

Let an attempt be made to realize what was the position which Wiclif consciously occupied at the critical point of his life when he was fulfilling his mission at Bruges. He combined in his own person the threefold character of theologian, churchman, and statesman. His view of the Divine

character and government controlled his opinions upon all that was earthly. Whilst it was commonly held by religious men that the Pope held a supreme authority over all Christian nations, Wiclif regarded the Eternal as the source of all authority, both ecclesiastical and secular. Whatever rule men exercised, in Church or State, they exercised by the favour of, and in dependence upon, the Lord of all. The unjust by their injustice forfeited all right to govern. Holding such principles as these, Wiclif could not engage in these negotiations between King and Pope without a strong sense of responsibility, without indifference to human approval or conventional standards.

Although Wiclif's visit to Bruges is the event of this period of his career which most impresses the imagination, there were other means by which he was fulfilling his vocation of Reformer. Among the shameless exactions practised by the Roman See were several which excited the indignation not of Wiclif only, but of all patriotic Englishmen. It may be assumed that whatever public action was taken against Rome was either prompted or supported by the acknowledged champion of his country's rights. The Papal See stationed in the metropolis of this country an agent, whose business it was to collect and forward to Rome

the enormous dues levied in this country for the benefit of the Head of the Church. In 1372, a French canon, Arnold Garnier, was accredited to England upon this mission; but before he was permitted to exercise his office, he was required to take a solemn oath in the presence of the councillors and officers of the Crown to respect the rights and interests of the kingdom. This man lived at a great cost, travelled in great state, and transmitted to Rome large sums of money through a series of years. In 1377, Wiclif wrote a pamphlet, in which he made it his business to prove that Garnier had violated his oath, and had acted in a manner prejudicial to the wealth, prosperity, and military power of England. In this document the Reformer broached views of a somewhat radical character with regard to the Pope, denying his infallibility and insisting upon the importance of his possessing the Christlike virtues of humility, patience, and brotherly love.

It has been held, and with every show of reason, that the proceedings of the "Good Parliament" of 1376 and 1377, so far as they aimed at Church reform, bear marks of the mind and of the reforming zeal of Wiclif. The Parliament complained that the Pope received from this realm five times as much revenue as accrued to the king! They complained also of

the conduct of the Papal receiver referred to above, and especially censured the practice of the Roman Court in appointing to English dignities and benefices men who, being foreigners, were unable to perform the duties of their offices, and, indeed, some of whom never came to this country.

The first Parliament of the young king Richard II. resolved to check the flow of gold from the kingdom into the Papal treasury, to the enrichment of the king's enemies. On this occasion Wiclif advised the king and his council that they were perfectly justified in taking measures to this end, notwithstanding the threat of Papal censures.

In what character Wiclif appeared in the arena of politico-ecclesiastical controversy, it is somewhat difficult to decide. He describes himself as "*peculiaris regis clericus*" ("the king's own cleric"), a designation which has been regarded as equivalent to "Royal Chaplain," but which Wiclif's German biographer, Lechler, interprets as implying that he was in some way a Member of Parliament. It is well known that Parliamentary usages were not so fixed and regular as they have since become, and it is possible that Wiclif took part in the deliberations and decisions of the legislature. "He was summoned, in 1376, to attend the King's Council, when the conversation he reports may have taken place; and

it is quite possible that he may have been ordered to attend in Parliament on special occasions" (Burrows). In support of his conjecture that Wiclif was actually a Member of Parliament, not merely in 1376, but probably ten years earlier, the German biographer urges:—"It is a fact, established by documentary evidence, that from the end of the thirteenth century, elected representatives of the inferior clergy were summoned to serve in Parliament. The fact, besides, is ascertained, that to the Parliament of 1366, besides bishops,

abbots, and lords, six masters of arts were summoned by royal order." If these facts open up the possibility for which Lechler contends, they leave it only a possibility. In an age in which church dignitaries filled high offices of State, and in which political and ecclesiastical affairs were so inextricably intertwined, it is perhaps natural to conceive of an Oxford Professor of Divinity coming forward to defend the rights of his country, and to protest against encroachments and extortion on the part of the Roman See.



CHAPTER V.

THE ENMITY OF ROME AND OF THE HIERARCHY AGAINST WICLIF—SUCCESSIVE PROSECUTIONS.

IN February 1377, Wiclif began to reap the reward of his patriotic boldness and his fearless opposition to the monstrous pretensions of Rome, in the hostility of the prelatie and Papal party. The political condition of the kingdom was very unsettled. The Black Prince had died in the previous summer, leaving his young son heir to the throne. The king had but a few months to live, his strength had long been declining, and he was the victim of numerous and complicated court intrigues. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, was hated by the bishops and was distrusted by the "Good Parliament," which had crippled his power for a time, until the death of his elder brother restored him to his natural position of influence.

It seems likely that the hierarchy, in planning an attack upon Wiclif, were really striking at the duke. Anticipating the action of the Court of Rome, Courtenay, Bishop of London, a young and ambitious prelate of noble birth and of powerful connections,

ventured on the bold step of summoning before Convocation, to answer to certain charges, the favourite of the Court and the beloved of the people. What the charges were we have no means of knowing, as no trial actually took place on this occasion. Wiclif obeyed the summons; but he did not come alone and friendless; he was powerfully supported. The nobles of England, generally indifferent to doctrinal questions, have nevertheless often shown their independence by resenting and resisting priestly domination. Whatever Rome and Rome's minions may have thought of Wiclif, there were in the highest stations many to whom he was the bold and masterly assertor of England's liberties and rights. In the time of his need such men came forward to cast their protection around the man of whose character and abilities they might well be proud. Wiclif, as a reformer, was regarded by the episcopal and papal party with suspicion and hatred; as a patriot he was the object of Lancaster's esteem.

Accordingly, when he appeared at St. Paul's, Wiclif was accompanied by two of the most powerful lords of the realm, who were resolved to see justice done to their client, and were pleased with the prospect of curbing prelatial bigotry. These were John of Gaunt and Percy, Earl Marshal of England.

The bishop took his place upon his throne in the old massive Norman cathedral of St. Paul's, and was surrounded by prelates, priests, and monks. The church was filled with an excited crowd of citizens.

Wiclif was at this time nearer sixty than fifty years of age. His witness hitherto had been one of active labour; from this time forward he was to be a "confessor," he was to suffer for the good cause to which he had committed himself. His great work and his harassing persecutions were to be crowded into the last eight eventful years of his life.

Wiclif, as he appeared before the bishop at St. Paul's, is thus described:—"A tall, thin figure, covered with a long light gown of black colour, with a girdle about his body; the head adorned with a full flowing beard, exhibiting features keen and sharply cut; the eye clear and penetrating, the lips firmly closed in token of resolution—the whole man wearing an aspect of lofty earnestness, and replete with dignity and character" (Lechler).

As Wiclif and his noble protectors made their way through the crowded building, noise and uproar arose, which reached the ears of the bishop, whose indignation was aroused. Hereupon, according to the old chronicler, the following dialogue ensued:—

"Bishop Courtney. Lord Percy, if I had known what masteries you would have kept in the church, I would have stopped you out from coming hither.

"Duke of Lancaster. He shall keep such masteries though you say nay.

"Lord Percy. 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 will bring down the pride, not of you alone, but of all the prelaty in England.

"Bishop Courtney. Do your worst, sir.

"Duke of Lancaster. Thou bearest thyself so brag upon thy parents, which shall not be able to keep thee; they 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,

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 will pluck the bishop by the hair out of the church."

Amidst the confusion in which this unseemly broil ended, anything like judicial proceedings was altogether impossible. The Reformer retired in the society of his friends.

Wiclif's citation before the prelate at St. Paul's thus issued in no decisive result. It was, in fact, complicated with political disputes; nor could it be otherwise in the state of public affairs then existing. But it is evident that the bishops were resolved to use and to strain their power to silence and to crush the man whose attachment to England and to the Bible was stronger than his attachment to the Church, of which he was a priest. In May of this year, Gregory XI. issued five bulls against Wiclif, three of which were directed to the Primate and the Bishop of London, one to the King, and one to the University of Oxford. The tenor of these bulls was, that an inquiry should be instituted into certain charges brought against the orthodoxy of the obnoxious Wiclif, and that if those charges should be substantiated, the heretic should be imprisoned until further instructions from Rome.

King Edward III. died on the longest

day of this year, 1377, and Gregory XI. died on the 27th of the following March. But the changes ensuing did not affect the position of Wiclif in relation to the Papal party.

Now, as Wiclif's distinctive doctrines as a reformer were not at this time developed, it is an interesting question to ask, What were the tenets which were so objectionable in the view of the Roman Curia as to prompt proceedings so vigorous? An examination of the condemned Articles shows that at this period of his life, Wiclif had not advanced any strictly doctrinal views, such for example as those which he afterwards maintained upon Transubstantiation, which could account for the prosecution upon theological grounds. The Theses respected the rights of inheritance and of property, which Wiclif regarded as not absolute, but dependent upon the grace of God; and Church property, which he thought might, in certain circumstances, be secularised by the temporal power; and Church discipline and the right of excommunication, which he would have rigidly restricted. Wiclif was obnoxious, it is evident, because he denied the absolute authority of the Church. There was, however, one article according to which he claimed for every priest the powers which the Church limited to the higher grades of her clergy.

Wiclif's opponents seem to have

taken pleasure in multiplying accusations of erroneous teaching against him. Sometimes his views were simply denounced as errors, whilst many of them were branded as heretical. A Romanist writer, the celebrated Cochläus,—who, however, wrote more than a century and a half after Wiclif's death,—swells the number of errors maintained by the heresiarch to the astonishing number of three hundred and three! He was evidently one of those who (to borrow Fuller's similitude) winnowed the Reformer's works, as Satan sifted Peter, only to find the *chaff*!

It was in obedience to the Papal mandate, which, however, had probably been prompted by the English episcopate, that Wiclif was summoned to appear before the Primate and the Bishop of London. Early in 1378, he accordingly presented himself before Sudbury and Courtenay at Lambeth Palace. He was not, as in the preceding year, accompanied and protected by great nobles, but he had good reason to appear before his superiors with confidence and courage. He was master of his subject, and quite competent to defend the Theses which were impugned by the Roman Curia. His written exposition and defence he handed in upon his appearance before the prelates, intending that his reply should be communicated to Rome.

It is a proof of the hold which the

Reformer had already gained upon the laity that in this second, as in the first, appearance before an ecclesiastical tribunal, Wiclif was guarded and delivered out of his enemies' hands by the leaders and representatives of the English people. On this occasion, citizens of London, learning that the liberty of their patriotic champion was menaced, pressed into the chapel at Lambeth, to afford him their countenance and support. The queen-mother also interested herself in the proceedings, and sent Sir Lewis Clifford, an officer of the Court, with peremptory instructions to the prelates that no condemnation was to be pronounced upon the accused. The authority of the widow of the Black Prince and the determined attitude of the people sufficed to check the persecuting zeal of the bigots. The prelates accordingly had no choice but to content themselves with simply forbidding Wiclif to promulgate the peculiar doctrines upon Church property, Church censures, etc., which had given offence. But he himself remained at liberty, and his position was rather strengthened than otherwise by the demonstration given of the powerlessness of his foes. All the more was this the case because the University of Oxford had received with marked coldness the mandate of the Pope to bring to an ecclesiastical tribunal her most distinguished son.

CHAPTER VI.

WICLIF AS PARISH PRIEST AT LUTTERWORTH.

THE great Oxford scholar received his first church preferment from the college of which he was for a short time the head. In 1361, he was presented by the Fellows of Balliol College to the rectory of Fillingham or Fylingham, in the county of Lincoln. After holding this living for seven years, he exchanged it for the rectory of Ludgershall in Buckinghamshire, doubtless in order to be nearer to Oxford, the chief scene of his activities. He was appointed to the rectory of Lutterworth in April 1374, the same year in which he undertook the mission to Bruges. This nomination was evidently a mark of royal favour; for the presentation lay with the Crown, in consequence of the minority of the patron, Lord Henry Ferrars. He received also, as mentioned above, a prebend at Aust, but held this preferment only for a very short period. In fact, he was no pluralist, and occupied but one cure of souls at any one time.

In his parochial work, Wiclif was, at all events in the latter part of his

life, assisted by his curates, Horn and Purvey. This latter learned and laborious helper, when Wiclif engaged in the enormous task of translating the Bible, was his assistant. After the master's death, he revised the whole Bible, and is accountable for the Version of 1388. Until the Reformer was silenced at Oxford, and retired to his benefice, his absences from Lutterworth must have been frequent and sometimes protracted, and then the parish duties must have been discharged by his curate. But it is known that the Rector of Lutterworth did not neglect his duties, either in the parish generally or in the church. According to a Lutterworth tradition, he spent a portion of every forenoon in visiting his parishioners. It is certain that Wiclif, who in his writings censured so severely the clergy who neglected their duties, and who exhibited so high a standard of ministerial devotedness, was not remiss in the fulfilment of the functions devolving upon him. Whether or not Chaucer's graphic picture of a good

parish priest was painted from Wiclif as its original, it may interest the reader to look upon it, as portraying the life and occupation of a good priest of the period :—

“A good man was ther of religioun,
 And was a pore Persoun of a toun ;
 But riche he was of holy thought and werk.
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk
 That Cristes gospel gladly wolde preche ;
 His parischens devoutly wold he teche.
 Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,
 And in adversite ful pacient ;
 And such he was approved ofte sithes.
 Ful loth were him to curse for his thythes,
 But rather wold he geven out of doute,
 Unto his pore parischens about,
 Of his offrynge, and eek of his substaunce.
 Wyd was his parisch, and houses fer asondur.
 But he ne lafte not for reyne ne thoundur,
 In siknesse ne in mischief to visite
 The ferrest in his pariseh, moche and lite,
 Upon his feet, and in his hond a staf.
 This noble ensample unto his sheepe he gaf,
 That ferst he wroughte, and after that he taughte,
 But of the gospel he the wordes caughte,
 And this figure he addid yit thereto :
 That if gold ruste, what schulde yren doo ?

He sette not his benefice to huyre,
 And left his scheep encombred in the myre,
 And ran to Londone, unto seynte Poules,
 To seeken him a chaunterie for soules,
 Or with a bretherhede be withholde ;
 But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,
 So that the wolfe ne made it not mescarye.
 He was a schepperde and no mercenarie ;
 And though he holy were and vertuous,
 He was to senful men nought dispitous,
 Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne,
 But in his teching discret and benigne.
 To drawe folk to heven by fairnesse,
 By good ensample, was his busynesse.
 But it were eny persone obstinat,
 What so he were of high or lowe estat,

Him wolde he snybbe scharply for the nones.
 A better preeste I trowe there nowher non is.
 He wayted after no pompe ne reverence,
 Ne maked him a spiced conscience,
 But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve,
 He taught, and ferst he folwed it himselve.”

Wiclif was not only a good parish priest ; he was a Scriptural, plain, and practical preacher. Leaving out of sight his Latin sermons, which were probably delivered before the university, and looking only at those which were preached in English, it seems natural, considering Wiclif's position, to regard them as intended both for delivery in his own church, and as models for the preachers whom it was a great work of his life to train. It was too common in those times for preachers to entertain rather than to instruct their hearers ; the mediæval sermons were occupied with fables from profane sources, with legends, and idle, foolish tales. Now Wiclif saw that the true vocation of the Christian preacher is the sowing of the Gospel seed, the presentation of Scriptural truth, both as to doctrine and precept, before the minds of men. And he eschewed the scholastic method of dividing a sermon, which was customary in his time, adopting a simpler and more natural style. A method he frequently employed was what was called in that age “*postillating*,” corresponding to what we call exposition. Some of his discourses are in the form of brief notes ; others are of the

length of an ordinary sermon. As we read these memorials of a ministry of five hundred years ago, we cannot but feel how great and beneficial must have been the influence of discourses so plain, so practical, so pungent, and so fearless alike in the denunciation of wrongs, the reproof of sins, and the inculcation of spirituality of life as contrasted with mere formality.

A large number of Wiclif's sermons are extant, and have been recently published. Many of them are upon the Epistles and Gospels for the Sundays of the Christian Year. These are especially full of evangelical truth and practical admonition. Wiclif was somewhat given to allegorizing the narratives and parables of Scripture,

in a method more ingenious than profitable. It appears as if the sermons or outlines were intended for the use of the parochial or evangelistic clergy, furnishing material for expansion and illustration.

In the parish church of Lutterworth some relics of its great rector are carefully and reverently preserved. A portrait of Wiclif, the chair in which he died, and the purple velvet communion-cloth which he used in celebrating the Lord's Supper, may all be seen by the visitor. A handsome monument was some years since erected to the memory of the great Reformer, whose name is for ever associated with this quiet Leicestershire town.



CHAPTER VII.

WICLIF THE OPPONENT OF ROMAN ERRORS, ESPECIALLY OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION.

IT is recognized that Wiclif's career as a reformer was progressive and gradual. For many years he took his stand as a patriot and as a champion of liberty in upholding the rights of the English crown and the English people against the grasping and domineering action of the Pope and his agents. And events, no doubt, taught him much ; as a man of sagacity and insight, he could not but have his eyes opened to the prevalence of corruptions and abuses on the part of those who should have been the spiritual guides and patterns to the community, and to the prevalence of ignorance and superstition on the part of the masses of the nominally Christian people. Like Luther at a later period, Wiclif first opposed the external and glaring evils of the times, and was led on afterwards to expose those more deeply-seated evils of belief and theory which were really the disease of which the practical mischiefs were the symptoms.

The exact point where the later stage

of the Reformer's career may be said to have commenced was the year 1378, the year of the Papal Schism, known in history as the Great Schism of the West. In the early part of this year died Pope Gregory XI., and before its close Europe was amazed and perplexed by the rival claims of Urban VI. and Clement VII. Men's minds were distracted by what they beheld ; it could not but occur to many that the pretence of the Church to unity was vain and hollow, and, further, that human ambition and greed were the motive power governing the action of those who professed to be but the servants of the Lord's servants. Wiclif was at first well affected towards Urban, but he very speedily discerned the utter worldliness of the great contention, and came to question the necessity of the Papacy itself, and to regard the actual Pope as no better than Antichrist. In his addresses both to the learned and to the people, he used very decided and vigorous language in denunciation

of the papal system. He was rapidly feeling his way towards a more Scriptural and spiritual conception of the Church of Christ than that which had become embodied in the Roman organization.

Set free from the trammels of human authority, his faith altogether shattered in the professed infallibility of Rome, Wiclif entered upon a new stage of experience and of labour. His study of the Bible had long opened his mind to the most spiritual views of the Christian faith and life; he was constructing a theology for himself. But his work was destructive as well as constructive. Error and hypocrisy, superstition and immorality were rampant, and were, alas! too largely countenanced and sanctioned by ecclesiastical beliefs and practices. Now as Wiclif cast himself adrift from the Papacy, it was natural that at the same time, and by reason of the same mental tendency, he should dissociate himself from many peculiarly papal doctrines, from many misrepresentations and distortions of Christian truth. And the more his prominent position and pronounced action led to his removal from public life, the more he naturally gave himself to intellectual inquiry, and followed the lead of independent conviction. It was in this manner that Wiclif came to turn his attention from the outward relations of the

Church, from its government and its practical abuses, to the theological doctrines which had in the course of centuries gained an authoritative position in ecclesiastical standards, formularies, and teaching.

The monstrous dogma of Transubstantiation had long been the prevailing doctrine of the Church with regard to the Eucharist. According to this subtle and unreasonable theory, the elements used in the Supper cease, upon consecration, to be bread and wine, *i.e.* so far as their *substance* is concerned. The body and blood of the Lord replace the substance of common food. It was maintained, in the metaphysical language of the times that the *accidents* remained, although the substance was changed. In this way the evident fact was accounted for, that the visible appearance remains the same after the mystic process has taken place. The words of consecration are supposed to be the means of effecting a complete change in that unseen substance, which is incognizable to sense and only apprehended by the reason. Nevertheless, all that can be seen, felt, or tasted is unchanged.

The doctrine of Transubstantiation was utterly unknown in Christendom until the eighth century, and when introduced it met with very varying reception both in the East and in the West.

Among the more famous opponents of the innovation were John Scotus Erigena in the ninth century and Berengarius in the eleventh. But in the Lateran Council, held A.D. 1215, the opinion of the real or carnal presence of Christ was not only confirmed, but the term *transubstantiated* was coined for the purpose of fixing and authorising the dogma. That council decreed "that there is one Universal Church of the faithful, without which there is none saved, in which Jesus Christ Himself is both Priest and Sacrifice, whose body and blood in the sacrament of the altar are truly contained under the shapes of bread and wine; the bread being transubstantiated, or substantially changed into His body, and the wine into His blood, by the power of God; that for the perfecting the mystery of our union, we might receive of Him what He had received of us." From that time this has been the received and authoritative doctrine of the Church of Rome with regard to the Eucharist. The Council of Trent, in the sixteenth century, declared "that by the consecration of the bread and wine is made a change of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood, which change is aptly and properly called by the Holy Catholic Church '*transubstantiation.*'"

Now during the greater part of his life, Wiclif was a most diligent and thorough student of the Scriptures, so large a part of which he himself translated for the benefit of his countrymen. It was natural that the sympathetic study of the New Testament should, by revealing to his candid mind the spirituality of true religion, open his eyes to the inconsistency between Christianity in its primitive form and the corruptions of later ages. Especially was it natural that he should reject the current theory of the Eucharist, around which so many superstitions had gathered, which were prejudicial to the best interests of the people. Wiclif accordingly taught both from the chair and from the pulpit, that although there is a real presence of Christ in the Sacrament, that presence is spiritual, and that the bread and wine remain substantially, essentially such after the words of consecration have been pronounced.

It was in the spring of 1381 that Wiclif, having by years of study convinced himself that Transubstantiation is an irrational, unscriptural, and misleading doctrine, published his conviction to the world. He preached in the pulpit, he propounded and defended in the lecture-room, a simpler and purer doctrine of the Lord's Supper. And as a scholar, a professor, a theologian, he felt bound

to enter upon controversy, and accordingly published at Oxford twelve theses on Transubstantiation, which he engaged to defend against all comers. These the reader will wish to have put before him; they are as follows:—

“1. The consecrated host which we see on the altar is neither Christ nor any part of Him, but the efficacious sign of Him.

“2. No pilgrim upon earth is able to see Christ in the consecrated host with the bodily eye, but by faith.

“3. Formerly the faith of the Roman Church was expressed in the Confession of Berengarius—viz., that the bread and wine which continue after the benediction are the consecrated host.

“4. The Lord's Supper, in virtue of the sacramental words, contains both the body and the blood of Christ, truly and really, at every point.

“5. Transubstantiation, Identification, and Impanation—terms made use of by those who have given names to the signs employed in the Lord's Supper—cannot be shown to have any foundation in the Word of God.

“6. It is contrary to the opinions of the saints to assert that in the true host there is an accident without a subject.

“7. The sacrament of the Eucharist is in its own nature bread and wine,

having, by virtue of the sacramental words, the true body and blood of Christ at every point of it.

“8. The sacrament of the Eucharist is in a figure the body and blood of Christ, into which the bread and wine are transubstantiated, of which latter the nature remains the same after consecration, although in the contemplation of believers it is thrown into the background.

“9. That an ‘accident’ can exist without a subject is what cannot be proved to be well grounded; but if this is so, God is annihilated, and every article of the Christian faith perishes.

“10. Every person or sect is heretical in the extreme which obstinately maintains that the sacrament of the altar is bread of a kind *per se*—of an infinitely lower and more imperfect kind even than horses' bread.

“11. Whosoever shall obstinately maintain that the said sacrament is an ‘accident,’ a quality, a quantity, or an aggregate of these things, falls into the before-said heresy.

“12. Wheaten bread, in which alone it is lawful to consecrate, is in its nature infinitely more perfect than bread of bean flour or of bran, and both of these are in their nature more perfect than an ‘accident’” (*Lorimer's Translation*).

Some of these propositions seem to

us, it must be admitted, rather trifling ; but allowance must be made for the scholastic forms in which controversy was in those times carried on. At all events, the Theses were in direct contradiction to the authorised teaching of the Roman Church. Their publication naturally excited at Oxford the liveliest indignation among the orthodox sons of the Church, and their condemnation was loudly demanded. The Chancellor of the University summoned a body of doctors of law and of theology to sit in judgment upon this remarkable manifesto. Notwithstanding the influence of Wiclif in the university and the sympathy of some Oxford scholars with the Reformer, the Conference was unanimous in condemning the Theses as erroneous and heretical. The Chancellor, himself an opponent of Wiclif, accepted this decision as authoritative, and drew up a decree stigmatizing the Theses as contrary to the true faith, prohibiting their maintenance in the university by public disputation, and forbidding any member

of the university from attending such disputation should it take place.

This proclamation was brought to the Reformer, it is said, while he was lecturing on this very subject of the Lord's Supper in a class-room of the Augustinian monastery. It was received with surprise, but with the observation that it could not affect his personal convictions. Thus the public oral teaching of Wiclif upon this great and vital question was brought to an abrupt close. After this Wiclif was confined to literature as the only means of diffusing his opinions. He enlarged the doctrine of the Theses in a "Confession" which he immediately wrote and published. He also prepared a short treatise, denominated "The Wicket," which became his most popular and widely circulated work. And henceforth all his religious writings contained reference to the fatal error of Romanism which he had so powerfully exposed, and which he felt to be at the root of so many errors beside.



CHAPTER VIII.

WICLIF'S ATTACKS UPON THE FRIARS.

IT was until lately universally believed that Wiclif commenced his work as a reformer by attacking the mendicant orders. These attacks have been represented as beginning as early as the year 1360. But more careful inquiry has shown that it was not until many years after this, in fact, until the year of the Papal Schism, 1378, that Wiclif assumed an attitude of hostility towards these active servants of the Papacy. It has been plausibly conjectured that his indignation was especially excited against the friars when they were made the agents for collecting funds with which the rival popes might carry on war against each other. The latest biographers of Wiclif date the commencement of his attack upon the mendicants from the year 1378, or even from a period so late as 1380.

There is evidence that, until a late period in his career, Wiclif was more tolerant of the friars than of the old-established monastic orders. The latter, the *possessio-nati*, or "monks possessioners," were particularly offen-

sive to him, because of their wealth and worldliness, whilst he was at one time disposed to look with favour upon the mendicants, of whose vows of poverty he warmly approved. When he appeared before the Bishop of London at St. Paul's, Wiclif was accompanied by five doctors of divinity belonging to the mendicant orders, who were apparently ready to defend some, at all events, of his special views.

It is not difficult to show how these mendicant friars came to incur the displeasure and indignation of thoughtful and high-minded Englishmen. Like many pernicious institutions, these orders were a corruption of what was originally not without value. There was in early times a powerful reason, though not a sufficient justification, for asceticism and monkery. Protest against the sins and temptations of the world led to withdrawal from its occupations, interests, and relations. The seeds of monkery were sown very early in the life of the Christian Church. But the irregular and spontaneous

ascetics of the East gave place, in the course of time, to the organized monastic orders, which have borne so prominent a part in the history of the Church of Rome. The most numerous and famous of these were the Augustinian and the Benedictine orders, who professed to follow the rules imposed by the saints whose names they respectively assumed. That these "regular" clergy,—that is, clergy living in obedience to the prescribed regulations of their orders,—these "religious," as they have been distinctively named in the Roman communion, did the world great service during the middle ages, is not questioned. No unprejudiced person can deny that they promoted civilisation, conserved literature, cultivated the arts, showed hospitality, succoured the poor. But the common fate of human institutions overtook them. Through sloth and luxury they became, in too many instances, lawless and vicious. Their number and their self-indulgence made them a tax upon the wealth of every country in which they lived. Their accountability to the Pope alone estranged them from national interests. In one sense, they were not separate from the world, for they cherished worldly ambition and amassed worldly wealth. In another sense they were separate from the world, for they held themselves largely aloof from its sorrows and its sins. Where it became them

to beware of the world, they caressed it; where it became them to mingle with the world, they withdrew from it.

Now the mendicant orders were, in the first instance, a protest of the spiritual life of the Catholic Church against the worldliness and comparative uselessness of the established monastic orders,—against their wealth, ambition, voluptuousness, and indolence. The founders of the two most vigorous of these orders—St. Francis and St. Dominic—obtained, early in the thirteenth century, the sanction of the Pope to their respective constitutions. These orders were known as "Friars" (from *frater*, *frère*), because of the brotherhood subsisting among them. They received the appellation "mendicant," because one of their principles was that no member should possess property, and, indeed, that the society itself should own nothing; so that they were dependent altogether upon the alms of the devout and grateful to whom they ministered. Poverty was to be their condition, and spiritual usefulness amongst all classes was to be their calling. Certainly, if the character and will of a founder could ensure the permanence and the true prosperity of a community, the Franciscans and Dominicans would never have grown rich, idle, or corrupt.

But there is abundant evidence to

prove that, in the fourteenth century, the Begging Friars were becoming in England a mischievous and debasing power. Their arrogance and meddling, their greediness, licentiousness, and profanity, were intolerable. Grossetête, the noble-minded forerunner of Wiclif, who had at first favoured these orders, lived to distrust and denounce them. Fitzralph, the zealous Archbishop of Armagh, had complained of them as encouragers of vice and crime, and had even sustained his complaints in the Papal Court. It was especially felt by the friends of morality to be a scandal that these vagabond preachers and confessors were resorted to by the licentious and criminal of every village, who received at their hands, as the reward of money, the absolution which the secular priest of the parish was too honest to bestow upon the hardened and impenitent.

The reformer himself pointed out, that in protesting against the mendicant orders he was simply following in the steps of distinguished and honoured champions of righteousness. "Nor," says Wiclif, "are we the first to complain of the 'sects'; but recently the blessed Richard, Bishop of Armagh, laboured to cleanse the Church of crimes newly introduced by the sects of friars. Similarly also Occam (himself a Franciscan) laboured, in conjunction with many other faithful

friars, towards the restoration of his own brethren, who had declined from the primitive rule. The same course was pursued by William of St. Amour, with many others, after the friars had established themselves. Lastly, Robert Grossetête, Bishop of Lincoln, a man of subtle intelligence, towards the close of his life and in the maturity of his character inveighed against these orders."

By the institution of an "order of penitence,"—an order designed to include such of the laity as were anxious to secure the benefits of the brotherhood without submitting to all its restraints,—the mendicants gained a hold upon a large and devout class of the community. But the influence they exercised was to a great extent pernicious. Under pretence of assoiling sinners by the authority of the Pope's bull, they were in the habit of acquiring, even of extorting money and goods for the benefit of themselves and of their orders, with an altogether shameless disregard of their professed principles. Nor was this the only mischief wrought by them which society resented. The mendicants were in the habit of insinuating themselves into the confidence of the youth at the universities, and of making proselytes among the students, some of whom were but of very tender age. These they sent to their seminaries

and trained as their associates. So great and general was the public distrust and indignation excited by these practices, that an Act was passed in Convocation forbidding any of the students of the universities under the age of eighteen to join these religious orders. And the alarm of parents was made unmistakably evident by the withdrawal of youths from Oxford in such large numbers as very seriously to diminish the importance of that ancient seat of learning. Wiclif did not go too far when he charged with blasphemy against God those who kidnapped raw youths, who might be destitute of every qualification for such a calling, and devoted them for life to the avocation of the friar.

The popular estimation in which the friars were held by our countrymen in the time of Wiclif, which was about a century and a half after their first appearance in England, may be learned from several passages in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." The purpose of the *Soumpner's Tale* was to turn the laugh of the merry company against the unlucky mendicant, and so to rouse his anger. Its coarseness can scarcely be excused for the sake of its verisimilitude. But the description given of the wight himself by Dan Chaucer in the Prologue is a lively portraiture, and is worth inserting in this place :—

" A frere ther was, a wantown and a merye,
 A lymytour, a ful solempe man.
 In alle the ordres foure is noon that can
 So moche of daliaunce and fair langage.
 He hadde i-mad ful many a mariage
 Of yonge wymmen, at his owne cost.
 Unto his ordre he was a noble post.
 Ful wel biloved and famulier was he
 With frankleyns over-al in his cuntre,
 And eek with worthi women of the town :
 For he hadde power of confession,
 As seyde himself, more than a curat,
 For of his ordre he was licentiat.
 Ful sweetely herde he confessioun,
 And pleasaunt was his absolucioun ;
 He was an esy man to geve penaunce
 Ther as he wiste han a good pitaunce ;
 For unto a poure ordre for to give
 Is signe that a man is well i-schrive.
 For if he gaf, he dorste make avaunt,
 He wiste that a man was repentaunt.
 For many a man so hard is of his herte,
 He may not wepe although him sore smerte.
 Therfore in stede of wepyng and preyeres,
 Men moot give silver to the poure freres.
 His typer was ay farsed ful of knyfes
 And pyttes, for to give faire wyfes.
 And certeynli he hadde a mery noote ;
 Wel couthe he synge and pleyen on a rote,
 Of yeddynge he bar utterly the prys.
 His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys.
 Therto he strong was as a champioun.
 He knew the tavernes wel in every toun,
 And everych hostiler and tappestere,
 Bet then a lazer, or a beggestere,
 For unto such a worthi man as he
 Acordede not, as by his faculte,
 To han with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.
 It is not honest, it may not avaunce,
 For to delen with no such poraille,
 But al with riche and sellers of vitaille.
 And overal, ther as profyt schulde arise,
 Curteys he was, and lowely of servyse.
 Ther nas no man nowher so vertuouus.
 He was the beste beggere in his hous,
 For though a widewe hadde noght oo schoo,
 So plesaunt was his *In principio*,

Yet wolde he have a ferthing or he wente.
 His purchas was wel bettre than his rente.
 And rage he couthe as it were right a whelp,
 In love-dayes couthe he mochel helpe.
 For ther he was not lik a cloysterer,
 With a thredbare cope as is a poure scoler,
 But he was lik a maister or a pope.
 Of double worstede was his semy-cope,
 That rounded as a belle out of the presse.
 Somwhat he lipsede, for his wantownesse,
 To make his Englyssch swete upon his tunge;
 And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde sunge,
 His eyghen twynkled in his head aright,
 As don the sterres in the frosty night,
 This worthi lymytour was cleped Huberd."

In order to form a just estimate of Wiclif's attacks upon the friars, it would be necessary to study his very full and systematic treatment of the "orders" in the fourth book of the *Triologus*, and to conjoin with this an examination of such of the polemical works as relate to the mendicants. Of these last, no fewer than twenty are reproduced in the lately published edition of Buddensieg. No student of these writings can believe that the reformer was actuated by any personal motive; he was evidently impelled to the course he took by a regard to Scripture and to the authority of righteousness and truth.

Wiclif believed that the Apocalypse foretold the loosing of Satan a thousand years after the ascension of Christ; and it struck him as a proof of this interpretation, that early in the second millennium of the Christian era, the several "orders" or "sects" came

into existence.* By a very odd conceit he connected these orders with Cain, who maliciously slew his righteous brother. The Carmelites professed to date from the time of Elijah, and to have had their first abode in Mount Carmel. The Augustinians (to be distinguished from the regular monks so named) claimed the authority of St. Augustine for their institution and regulations. Wiclif put together the initial letters of the four mendicant orders, and made them compose the word "Caim," a little deflected from Cain. The orders thus stigmatized were: Carmelites, Augustinians, Jacobites (or Dominicans), and Minorites (or Franciscans). It was certainly a very poor exercise of wit to nickname the religious houses as "Cain's Castles!" Vehement invective was more in Wiclif's way than wit, and he termed the friars "limbs of Antichrist, spiritual manslayers, necromancers, ghostly adulterers!"

As Wiclif understood the matter, the orders that had sprung up in the Church, and that enjoyed the sanction of the Pope, professed and practised a "private religion" of their own. This way of conceiving their position

* Of the four mendicant orders, the Dominicans, or Black Friars, came to England in 1212; the Franciscans, or Grey Friars, in 1224; the Carmelites, or White Friars, in 1250; and the Augustinians, or Austin Friars, in 1252.

is just, and shows that the Reformer's logical mind went to the very root of the evil. The prelates, monks, and friars all diverged from the simple path of piety and humility marked out by the Divine Head of the Church. It was not Christ's religion which they adopted; it was a system of rules and a mode of life of their own invention. If Scripture authority, if New Testament precedent, could not be adduced in favour of any custom, that fact alone was sufficient to condemn it in the apprehension of the Reformer. He had no sympathy with the doctrine now known as that of "development under abiding inspiration"; Christ was his Master, and Christ alone.

The charges which Wiclif in his *Trialogus* brings against the sects or friars are these,—first, that they teach the doctrine of Transubstantiation, a superstitious and irrational distortion of the true doctrine of the Eucharist; secondly, that they adduce the example of the Lord Jesus in support of their practice of maintaining themselves by begging; and, thirdly, that they dispose of "letters of fraternity," professing to transfer their own merits before God to those who pay them well for such documents, thus trafficking upon the credulity and superstition of the people. These letters of fraternity were sold to the benefactors of the convents, and entitled those who bought them to

spiritual advantages guaranteed by the prayers of the friars or by the privileges of the monasteries. They were frequently made the subject of popular satire. Besides these main charges, the Reformer censures the orders for their pride and self-aggrandisement, for their hypocritical pretence of following Christ in His poverty, for their avarice and simony, for the burden which by their numbers and their demands they lay upon the English nation, for their indolence and self-indulgence, for their habit of setting their own notions above the law of Christ, for their neglect of the duty of mutual exhortation and rebuke, for their love of worldly honour and gain, and, finally, for their unrighteous habit of confessing and absolving sinners for the sake of gain.

The severity with which Wiclif attacked the friars must have arisen from his own observation of their hypocrisy and mischievousness. In one of his pamphlets he described the begging friar as a pardoner with stolen bulls and false relics, or as a pedlar with trifling gifts or pet dogs, to be presented to ladies, who, it is certain, will well repay any gifts that are offered to them. The friar is accompanied by an Iscariot, who carries the bag in which all alms and gifts are deposited. As a mendicant, he cannot *touch* coin, for that would be contrary to his vow; but he is ready to count any money

that is given him, either with gloved hands or by the aid of a stick! When the friar preaches, he takes the opportunity to cry down the parish priests and to extol himself and his order; he tickles the ear of his audience, in the hope of getting "a good collection."

It was, in Wiclif's judgment, a serious charge against the friars that, being unproductive and unnecessary members of society, they constituted a heavy burden upon the community. He thought that the clergy already in existence before the rise of the orders were sufficient for the spiritual service of the Church, and that these orders were a mere superfluity. A calculation had been made that there were 4,000 friars in England, and that they expended no less a sum than £40,000 annually, at that time, and according to the value of money in the fourteenth century, a very large sum. Thus they tended to impoverish the realm, whilst the moral injury they inflicted exceeded the pecuniary.

Wiclif remarks that the friars took more from the kingdom of England than Christ and all His apostles took from Judæa, whilst they paid neither king nor emperor a didrachma, as Jesus did. In fact, they acknowledged no responsibility to either king or bishop!

In one of the most important of his polemical tracts, Wiclif propounds his doctrine regarding "the four new sects,"

which he deems an infraction upon the proper unity of the Church, and a weakness and injury to the kingdom of England and other realms. (1) Under the designation, "*Cæsarean priest*," he includes the endowed priests, the bishops, the cardinals, and the Pope himself. The wealthy clergy and dignitaries constitute a drain upon the national resources. Treasure ought not to be sent out of the country to enrich a foreign power. (2) The *monks*, *i.e.*, the Benedictines, who are under a vow of poverty, nevertheless accumulate wealth, often live in luxury, and absorb property which might serve for the relief of the poor. (3) The *canons*, or Augustinians, are guilty of falsehood in claiming Augustine as their founder; they are censured for their pretended miracles and for their procuring the canonization of their so-called saints. (4) The *friars*, or mendicant orders, are more mischievous even than the others; their hypocrisy is a moral pest, and their maintenance is a heavy burden to the country.

In this treatise are to be found some of the boldest, most revolutionary, and astonishing statements and proposals. Christ, says Wiclif, is the Head of the Church, and the Pope, who is regarded as the earthly head, may very well be dispensed with. If, he urges, there were men who were faithful and holy, and who came to salvation before the incar-

nation of Christ, because the Word of God dwelt in them, surely the believers in the Saviour do not need a pope to secure their spiritual well-being. Every predestinated man, *i.e.*, every true Christian, is a priest; a spiritual character, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are alone all-important. If the Pope is a follower in St. Peter's footsteps, and only in such case, he is worthy of respect. The episcopal order cannot be traced up to the New Testament times; bishops, as they now are, are a superfluity. The four orders or sects are not only useless, they have no support in Scripture, and they are mischievous to the community; unless they can be reformed, which seems unlikely, they had better be abolished. It would be sufficient for the true good of the people that a holy and diligent minister should be appointed to reside in every parish.

In his attacks upon the evils prevalent in the Church, Wiclif had the sympathy of many. He was not the first to expose practical errors and palpable wrongs. Wiclif denounced the luxurious and worthless life led by many of the great prelates of the Church; he declaimed against the simony which was prevalent in his day, against the terms upon which many priests were wont to give absolution, and even against the whole system of Indulgences.

It would have been strange if such

language as Wiclif was in the habit of using with reference to those whom he designates "the sects," especially with reference to the friars, had not awakened their resentment, and impelled them to put forth every effort to silence an adversary so uncompromising and so formidable. An anecdote is recorded which exhibits the hostility that existed between the Reformer and those whom he earnestly desired to reform.

At this time the labours of the good and zealous doctor were excessive; and it is not surprising to learn that they brought on a serious illness. According to the simple narrative of Foxe, Wiclif's adversaries, the friars, took advantage of his state of health to visit him, with the hope of convincing him of the errors of his past conduct, especially in opposing their reprehensible practices. It is said that a deputation, consisting of friars and aldermen, visited the reformer in his sick chamber at Oxford, and urged him, as in the prospect of death, to repent of his language concerning the brotherhoods, and to recant. The sick man listened to what his visitors had to say. Then raising himself in his bed, and looking his adversaries in the face, he exclaimed, adopting the language of the Psalmist: "I shall not die, but live, to show forth the works of the Lord!" According to some authorities, he added, "and to expose the evil deeds of the friars!"

CHAPTER IX.

WICLIF'S PREACHERS, OR POOR PRIESTS.

AS Wiclif's mind became impressed with the infinite importance of purer and more Scriptural religious teaching than the people generally could obtain, or could even desire, he naturally sought means by which to diffuse the Gospel among all classes of his fellow-countrymen. He showed a just sense of the necessity of a living and personal agency of evangelization. Himself a preacher to both learned and lay, he was not likely to undervalue the proclamation of the truths of Christianity by the living voice. The ordinary preaching of that time, it has already been remarked, was neither Biblical, impressive, nor interesting; and such preaching as was capable of interesting was not conducive to spiritual results. The friars, especially the Dominicans, were largely devoted to this homiletic ministry, but we have abundant evidence of their inefficiency for purposes of spiritual enlightenment and improvement.

Wiclif's position at Oxford brought him into contact with a large number

of studious young men, amongst whom many must have been sincerely pious and anxious to do good. This would especially be the case with such as were looking forward to holy orders. And it seems extremely natural that Wiclif, as the greatest scholar and the most prominent man of the university, should draw around him many ardent and benevolent spirits ready to receive a noble impulse from his own. It is probable that the Reformer, not later than 1378, perhaps some years earlier, formed what might be termed a seminary for young candidates for the priest's office. Some have indeed supposed that Lutterworth was the centre from which this agency radiated, but the presumption, and what slight evidence there is, are in favour of Oxford. In the university, especially whilst in immediate relation with Wiclif, these young men would be most favourably situated for receiving a thorough training in Scriptural and theological learning, and for enjoying the benefit of the Reformer's practical and experimental counsels.

In this way undergraduates and graduates of the university were equipped by the learned and devoted Reformer for a holy and efficient ministry. Probably the preachers whom Wiclif sent out were all priests, though this has been questioned. They are described as clad in a plain russet gown, and as walking bare-footed, with staff in hand. They were dependent for daily bread and nightly lodging upon the kindness and hospitality of the people to whom they ministered. They went on foot from parish to parish; wherever they could collect an assembly, in churches and churchyards, at markets and fairs, they preached the Gospel of Christ. Their authority was the Bible, the law of Christ. In some respects their addresses must have been controversial; they must have unmasked hypocrisy, rebuked superstition, corrected error. Yet it is clear that their chief vocation was to point men to the Saviour, in whom the sinful might find forgiveness, the tempted succour, the sorrowful consolation, and the feeble strength.

Wiclif was not satisfied merely to send out his missionaries; he supplied them with ammunition for the spiritual war in which they were engaged. Many of his publications were in all likelihood intended to serve as material for the use of his disciples. One treatise still extant commences with the ob-

servation that it has been prepared in order that simple priests, inflamed with the love of souls, may have material for their discourses. This treatise is entitled, "Of the Six Yokes." It sets forth in a succinct and comprehensive way the several bonds which unite society together, which may all be consecrated by Christian faith and principle; it is well fitted to afford the theme for several practical addresses.

From references made to their labours in the writings of the chroniclers of the period, it seems that Wiclif's itinerant preachers had made Oxfordshire and Leicestershire the centres of their pastoral work, and that they laboured also in the city of Bristol in the west. But it was often only at the risk of persecution, or, at all events, of opposition, that the poor priests could carry on their work. Wiclif, in one of his tracts, complains, with an evident reference to these zealous labourers, that whilst false and worthless friars are readily licensed by the bishops, the faithful priest, who wishes freely to preach the Gospel of Christ, is sometimes prohibited from ministering in a diocese. But these devoted men braved dangers; and they sometimes found supporters even among the knights and gentry, who would band together to form a guard for the preacher's protection, and would send him on, when summoned to

appear before the ordinary, in safety to the next parish. "Oo (*i.e.*, one) comfort," wrote Wiclif, "is of knighttes that thei savoren myche the gospel, and han wille to rede in Englishe the gospel of Christis liif."

The tract, "Why poor priests have no benefices," has been usually attributed to Wiclif. Three reasons are in this composition assigned for the indisposition of his followers to accept livings: first, the dread of simony, which was too common in the appointment to livings, and which, however disguised, is treason against God; secondly, the fear of misspending the church property, which is largely contributed by the poor, but which it is customary to waste on the rich and idle; and, thirdly, because more good may in many cases be done by a life of active and zealous itinerancy than by stationary labour in a parish. There is something very genuine as well as very quaint in the conclusion of this tract:—"For to be more like to the life of Christ and His apostles, and for to profit more their own souls, and other men's, some poor priests think, with God, to travel about where they shall most profit, and by the evidence that God giveth them, while they have time and a little bodily strength and youth. Nevertheless, they condemn not curates who do well their office, and dwell where they

shall most profit, and teach truly and stably the law of God against false prophets, and the accursed deceptions of the fiend. Christ, for His endless mercy, help His priests and common people to beware of Antichrist's deceits, and to go even the right way to heaven. Amen, Jesu, for Thy endless charity."

It appears from this language what an error it is to represent the poor priests as in any way opposed to the parochial clergy. Where these were doing their duty, they would welcome the assistance of the faithful evangelists; where they were incompetent or negligent, it is plain that the services of the itinerants were needed.

Much light is cast upon this department of Wiclif's labours by the record of the examination of William Thorpe, one of the "poor priests," who appeared, in 1407, before Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, and who gave an account of the manner in which he first came to engage in evangelistic work. When young, it was his wish to be thoroughly equipped for the priest's office, and with a view to this training he obtained permission from his parents to betake himself to "wise and virtuous priests." He accordingly resorted to the holiest, the most learned, and wisest to be found. "I remained," he says, "long enough in intercourse with them to be convinced by their constant occupation in what was virtuous and

good, that their works, so rich in charity and worthy of all honour, even exceeded the fame which I had earlier heard of them. It was then my endeavour, after the example of their doctrine, but principally of their godly and blameless works, to come to a perfect knowledge of God's law, to the best of my ability, with the will and desire to frame my life accordingly." When asked who these teachers were, Thorpe candidly replied, "Magister John Wiclif was held by right many for the greatest scholar of that day; he was spoken of, at the same time, as a man of strict religious principles, and blameless in his walk." After naming Ashton, Hereford, Purvay, and others, he continued, "With all these men I was right well acquainted, and for a long time had much intercourse with them, and received instructions from them, but from Wiclif himself most of all, as the most virtuous and most godly wise man whom I ever heard of, or whom I ever in my life became acquainted with." It is evident that Thorpe was but one of many who, under the inspiration derived from Wiclif, led a life of self-denying devotion to the cause of pure religion and morality. "By the authority of God's law, and also of saints and doctors,"

this noble man declared, "I am taught to believe that it is every priest's office and duty to preach busily, freely, and truly the Word of God, when and to whom that ever we may."

That Wiclif's preaching priests made a notable impression upon the English people in many parts of the land is apparent from the indignation and opposition of the ecclesiastical authorities. In May 1382, Archbishop Courtenay, one of the Reformer's most active and persistent opponents, addressed to the Bishop of London a mandate, in which he bitterly complained of "certain unauthorised itinerant preachers, who, as he had unhappily been compelled to learn, set forth erroneous, yea, heretical assertions, in public sermons, not only in churches, but also in public squares and other profane places. This they do," he added, "under the guise of great holiness, but without having obtained any episcopal or papal authorisation." The articles annexed to this mandate make it evident that the doctrines complained of were Wiclif's doctrines, and, therefore, that the preachers were Wiclif's priests.

The work which these men did was their best witness; Divine blessing authenticated their ministry.

CHAPTER X.

WICLIF'S TREATISES, SERMONS, AND PAMPHLETS, IN ENGLISH AND IN LATIN.

IT is somewhat difficult for us to realise the influence of literature in the centuries before printing was invented. Accustomed as we are to the daily, weekly, and monthly publications which make the intellectual and political atmosphere we breathe, receiving as we do our regular contingent of new volumes from the library, it seems to us as if literature and the printing-press, with all the industrial mechanism connected with it, were inseparable. And in our days, when education is becoming universal, it is not easy to picture to ourselves how mighty was the power of books even over a population of which but a small portion was able to read and write. It must, however, be remembered that there were numerous scribes, whose vocation it was to multiply copies of the writings of able and popular writers, and who were in the habit of adapting their work to the class of purchasers for whom they catered. And it may be believed that when books were com-

paratively few, the author who had the ear, so to speak, of the reading public, was all the more likely to meet with a widespread attention. In our times, most writers, even popular writers, appeal to a class,—a political party, a religious denomination, or a literary clique. This was less the case in centuries when authors and books were few. If Chaucer's *Tales* appealed mainly to the upper and cultured class, the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, there can be no doubt, excited a very widespread interest among the hard-working section of the population, whose grievances it expressed, and with whose aspirations it harmonized. Now, Wiclif's writings found eager readers in every class of English society.

Wiclif's writings are very numerous. It is not always certain whether or not a work that bears his name is genuine. For a long period it was considered that he was the writer of a treatise upon "The last age of the Church," but critical judgment has decided that,

though written in Wiclif's century, and representing certain of Wiclif's views, this work is not the production of the great reformer. But of undoubtedly authentic works of Wiclif there are some hundreds still extant in manuscript. Of these, many are in the university and public libraries of this country; but, strange to say, a very large number are preserved only in the great libraries of Vienna and Prague, and other Continental cities. This is accounted for by the fact that Wiclif's doctrines were disseminated through some parts of Continental Europe, and especially in Bohemia, in which country his writings were the seed from which sprang the luxuriant crop of so-called heresy that excited the persecuting wrath of the Council of Constance.

Wiclif's most elaborate and masterly works were written in Latin, as were at that period all books intended for the learned. His earlier productions were of a logical or philosophical character; the interest of these is chiefly historical, and is confined to those who have made a special study of these abstruse topics. But the bulk of his Latin writings are either purely theological or of a polemical character, though the controversial tracts generally combine theological discussion with argument upon politico-ecclesiastical subjects. The English writings,

on the other hand, are almost all brief and popular; some of them are homiletical, and others controversial. It is to be noted that some of the Latin polemical tracts have their counterpart in the vernacular. In treating of Wiclif as a preacher, brief reference has already been made to the homiletical writings which are extant, and which have been recently printed.

Perhaps the publication of Wiclif's which was most widely circulated and read was his *Wyckett*, a pamphlet written in 1381, in popular exposition of his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and in opposition to the Roman tenet of Transubstantiation. There is no doubt that this tract produced a great effect in enlightening the minds of many upon one of the most incredible inventions of Rome.

It is not creditable to our country that the works of one of the greatest of Englishmen should be so little known, partly because they are so inaccessible. Until recently, very few of Wiclif's numerous writings had been published. This reproach has been to some extent removed, and there seems reason to hope that before long, through the scholarly operations of the "Wiclif Society," the greater part of the Reformer's works may see the light. It is even now scarcely possible to form a fair and independent judgment upon the literary work of one who has

hitherto, as a writer, been estimated mainly by tradition.

The great mediæval theologians wrote what we should call systems of theology, dealing with the whole doctrine of the Deity, especially in relation to man, and treating their vast theme upon logical and scholastic principles. Wiclif, himself a Professor of Divinity, and not only a student of Scripture, but an independent thinker upon revealed truth, wrote much upon theology proper. The position which he occupied in English history was such that his controversial works have always received the largest measure of attention, but his constructive treatises upon theology deserve to be studied equally with the most famous works of his greatest predecessors, Peter the Lombard, Albert the Great, or Thomas Aquinas. The work of Wiclif which is said to be the most masterly and learned, as well as the most comprehensive, is the *Summa Theologiæ*, in twelve books, which he completed about 1378. This, however, has never yet been printed, and cannot therefore be described or analysed.*

One of Wiclif's theological works, the *Trialogus*, is better known than the rest, owing to its having been printed as early as in the year 1525, at Basle, and again at Leipzig and Frankfurt in

1753. It was reprinted at Oxford in 1869, under the editorship of Dr. Lechler. Considered until lately Wiclif's chief theological production, this work is the source from which students and expositors of our great Reformer's doctrines have freely drawn their material. References occurring to the Roman tenet of Transubstantiation, and controversial chapters upon the friars, have led critics to assign the composition of the *Trialogus* to the later years of Wiclif's life.

In order to give more interest to the exposition and discussion of great theological doctrines, the author adopts the form of the dialogue, in which three personages take part. *Alithia* (or Truth) sustains the part of a solid philosopher; a captious unbeliever, entitled *Pseustis* (or Falsehood), brings forward objections; whilst a third interlocutor, described as a subtle and ripe theologian, *Phronesis* (or Wisdom), gives decision in favour of the truth.

It must be admitted that the personages introduced have no human personality, and that the dialogue is conducted with an utter absence of platonic grace; the characters all speak as logicians, and waste no words. It must also be remarked that the scholastic form into which the arguments are thrown, and the redundancy of logical terms and distinctions, render the volume in many parts almost un-

* The Wiclif Society is preparing this and other works of the Reformer for speedy publication.

intelligible to the reader unacquainted with dialectics and the ancient and mediæval philosophies. The writer was perfectly familiar with Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Anselm, and seems to have thought out theological questions, in the forms, indeed, of his predecessors, but with a vigorous independence.

The first book treats of God, reasons out His existence and attributes, and expounds the Trinity. The second book is concerned with the universe, and especially with man, "the microcosm," his bodily and spiritual nature, with the angels and the heavenly bodies. In the third book are described the several virtues and vices, from which the author proceeds to consider the Saviour, Christ, His incarnation and His sovereignty and law. The fourth and longest book is upon Signs and Sacraments. In this may be found some of Wiclif's distinctive evangelical views. He affirms that Holy Scripture is the law, the judgment, of Jesus Christ, and is therefore true in every part, and declares that if the faithful would only draw their doctrines from the pure Word of God, they would estimate at their true value the "bulls" of the popes, and the opinions of the recent teachers, which have arisen since the release of Satan, *i.e.*, a thousand years after Christ. He teaches, that whilst the

baptism with *water* is scriptural, and the baptism with *blood* is distinctive of martyrs, it is "the baptism with *fire*, *i.e.*, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is absolutely necessary for every man if he is to be saved." Similarly with regard to the Eucharist, he makes the plainest distinction between the sign and the thing signified. He repudiates the change of substance believed by the Romanists to take place in the elements, and even inclines to the belief that laymen may consecrate the bread and wine.

Whilst Wiclif does not deny that Confirmation, Orders, Matrimony, etc., are sacraments, he takes this word "sacrament" in a lax and general sense, applying it to any act which is a sign of a spiritual truth. It is noticeable that he maintains, that in the primitive Churches there were but two orders of ministry,—presbyters and deacons. With regard to the Sacrament of Extreme Unction he does not consider that there is sufficient foundation for this in Holy Scripture, and censures those who teach that its reception is necessary for salvation.

It thus appears, that whilst in the *Trialogus* those great Christian doctrines which are held alike by Romanists and Protestants are cordially accepted and defended by our great Reformer, upon matters in dispute

between these two sections of Christendom Wiclif for the most part sided by anticipation with the Protestants.

In his polemical tracts against the Pope,—six in number,—Wiclif deals with the Papacy in a manner so just, so practical, and so trenchant, that, after reading them, we can no longer wonder at the intense hatred with which the name of the English Reformer was regarded at Rome. There is no empty abuse; but the charges made are brought home with marvellous vigour, and the remedy proposed is radical indeed.

There was a papal custom against which Wiclif loudly protested. The Pope was in the habit of summoning any person who incurred his displeasure to appear at a certain time and place before himself, to answer for his conduct; and this citation was without necessary reference to the sovereign whose subject was summoned. The Reformer argued that there was no Scriptural authority for such a practice, that it involved the assumption that the Vicar of Christ is a judge in worldly matters, and that compliance on the part of those summoned to Rome involved them in dangers both to body and soul. Wiclif's indignant protest against Papal usurpation led him to make some very strong statements with reference to the Pope, whom he contrasts with Christ, the true Head

of the Church. He calls upon the soldiers of Christ to fulfil their vow to their Divine Commander, and to resist the unjust claims of Antichrist.

As already noticed, the schism between the anti-popes and their several adherents was the means of convincing Wiclif, and, doubtless, many beside, of the unfounded nature of papal pretensions. This schism was brought home to Englishmen in a very distressing way when a crusade was preached by Spencer, Bishop of Norwich, with a view of raising an army and funds for the assistance of Urban, and against the French pope, Clement. The greatness of Wiclif's mind was evinced by his perception of the larger bearings of this transaction. He went at once to the root of the evil, and saw in this wretched warfare a sign of the worldly ambition and selfish pride of the pretenders to the headship of the Church of the lowly Saviour. To him a power which could sacrifice the lives of thousands for the sake of personal aggrandisement and dominion was Antichrist itself. He even drew the practical inference, that since the Pope had proceeded in a direction exactly contrary to that of Christ, it was the duty of Christendom, and especially of the secular lords and princes, to turn their back upon the Pope.

In a very remarkable treatise on

“Christ and His foe Antichrist,” Wiclif drew out at length the contrast between the true Divine Head of the Church and His pretended vicegerent. The antagonism is thus developed:—Christ is the truth, while the Pope is the principle of falsehood and lies; Christ’s poverty contrasts with the Pope’s worldly magnificence, and Christ’s meekness and humility with the Pope’s pride and cruelty. Whilst Christ’s law is perfect and sufficient, the Pope’s is cruel and oppressive; whilst Christ’s spirit was that of the missionary, the Pope and his creatures live in palaces or secluded monasteries. Christ refused worldly power; the Pope claims to rule over kings: Christ obeyed the emperor, but the Pope weakens the secular power: Christ had twelve simple disciples; the Pope has twelve crafty, ambitious, worldly cardinals: Christ suffered for His own; the Pope calls his followers to fight for him. Christ confined His ministry to Palestine; the Pope sends his agents to every land for the increase of his power and wealth: Christ lived without pomp, and was content to serve; the Pope has a magnificent court, and demands homage from the emperor: Christ despised fame and gold; with the Pope everything is marketable.

In his *Tracts and Treatises*, Wiclif exposed all injustice and oppression, and all inconsistency and hypocrisy,

by whomsoever practised. The state of society in that age was such as to place great power in the hands of those in any kind of authority, and to allow little remedy to the lowly. The Reformer was not merely an advocate for pure doctrine; he was solicitous for righteousness of life. He spared none, however great and powerful, who deserved rebuke, but complained of the wrongs which the common people often had to endure,—for example, the packing of juries, the perversion of justice, the extortionate taxation from which the English population suffered.

The Reformer did not scruple to use vehement, even violent language concerning his enemies, whom he regarded as enemies of the truth of God. The Pope and his adherents, especially the wealthy and titled clergy, are, for example, designated “satraps and Pharisees.”

The reader will be interested to read a few paragraphs culled from Wiclif’s English writings, which may serve as examples of the Reformer’s style, and also of the English of the fourteenth century:—

“And her men noten many harmes that freris don in the chirche; thei spulen the puple many weies, by ypocrisie and other lesyngis; and bi this spuylyng thei biden caymes castelis to harm of cuntres; thei stelen por mennes children, that is worss than

stele an oxe, and thei stelen gladliche eyres. I leeve to speke of stelying of wymmen. And thus thei maken londs bareyn, for withdrawyng of werkmen, not al oonly in defaut of cornys, but in beestis and other good."*

The tract entitled, *Of Antecrist and his Meynee*, was printed by Dr. Todd, but Wiclif's best critics do not accept it as his; the style is too flowing and rhetorical. An example may be of interest. The writer asks, after enumerating the Papal officers and dependants, the whole ecclesiastical multitude, Which of all this meyne (or host) followeth the Lord? and he replies by a series of antitheses:—"Christ was poor, and they be rich, as many men suppose. Christ was meek and low, and they full high and proud. Christ was suffering and forgave, and they will be avenged. Christ forsook worldly glory, and they seek it fast. Christ would not worldly lordship, and they croken (crook, *i.e.*, bend) fast to them. Christ washed His disciples' feet lowly and meekly, and the Pope will crown the emperor with his feet, and suffer men to kiss them kneeling on their knees. Christ came to serve, and they seek to be served. Christ went on His feet, and His disciples with Him, to teach and turn the people, in cold and in

heat, in wet and in dry; the Pope and other bishops well keep their feet full clean with scarlet and cordewain, and sometimes with sandals, with gold, with silver, and silk preciously dight. Christ went in great sweat and swink (labour), and they sit in their proud castles with their proud many, and keep them busily from the sun burning. Christ preached and blessed, and they curse, and bless full seldom," etc., etc. This series of antitheses is extended through many pages.

The following passage on the raising of Lazarus is an example of Wiclif's trenchant method of dealing with current error, and of his clear statement of evangelical truth:—

"And no word of this story here wantith sutil goostli witt. Crist criede with greet vois, to teche that soulis in purgatorie, be thei nevere so fer from him, comen anoon to his crye. Thes bondis in whiche this man cam forth, shewen the miracle of Crist, how he movede this bodi that was deed to come forth thus al bounden. And it bitokeneth also that men that ben unbounden of preestis, ben bifore quykened of God. And thus Crist bad his apostlis loousen hem. For it is an open blasfeme that preestis forgyven this synne in God, but gif God forgyve it first, and seie to preestis that thei shewen it. For alle the men heere in erthe, ben thei nevere so grete

* *De Ecclesia et Membris ejus*, Ca. 5.—TODD.

lordis, may not forgyve synne doon in man, but gif this man forgyve it first; myche more men shulden not presume to forgyve synne don agens God, but gif God forgyve it first, and thei be trewe bedelis to telle it. And this blasfemye that is usid now shulde be knowe of the scribis, that popis assoilen men of synne and peyne, whanne it turneth men to avantage. Sothli, but gif God assoile first, ther assoilinge is feyned falseheed, and thei blasfeme in God, as thei don ofte whanne thei shryven. This fruyt among othere cometh of scrifte that men have ordeyned.”*

The following exposition of the Parable of the Lost Coin is given as a sample of his allegorical method of interpreting Scripture:—

“This womman is Jesus Crist, wysdom of the Fadir; these ten dragmes ben his resonable creaturis, for thei ben maid alle to ymage and licnesse of the Trinite. The tenthe dragma that was lost is mankynde, the lanterne that was lighted is the manhede of Crist, the turning up of his

* *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, by Thomas Arnold, vol. ii., p. 100.

house is change of statis that ben maid in this world by manhede of Crist. For the angel wolde not suffren Joon to knele and worshipe him, for his lord was Joones brother, and the aungelis weren hise servauntis; and so many thingis of this world weren turnid up so down, sith evry parte of this worlde was beterid bi Christis manhede.”*

The following passage, printed in modernized spelling, contains a clear statement upon the value of intercessory prayer:—

“Many men are deceived in founding of chantries, in costly sepulchres, and in solemn sepultures; and all these feed the world, and do no profit to the soul; but as they harm men living, so they do harm to the soul. And as anent mass or prayers, Christian men should well wit that good life of a ploughman is as much worth to the soul as prayer of his friar, although it profit somewhat. And, therefore, it is an open folly to bargain with priests for such prayer, since they cannot ground by reason the value of their prayer.”

* *Ibid.* i. 9.



CHAPTER XI.

WICLIF'S ENGLISH BIBLE.

“But, to outweigh all harm, the sacred Book,
In dusty sequestration wrapt too long,
Assumes the accents of our native tongue ;
And he who guides the plough, or wields the
crook,
With understanding spirit now may look
Upon her records, listen to her song,
And sift her laws, much wondering that the
wrong
Which Faith has suffered Heaven could calmly
brook.”

AS England was the country in which the first great, reasoned, and powerful protest was raised against the lordship and spiritual authority of Rome, so the English tongue was the first of modern European languages into which the Holy Scriptures were translated.

To Wiclif we are indebted, perhaps more than to any other man, for our English language, which he did more to fix than even Chaucer. Our national religion bears to the present day the impress of our great Reformer's character. But of all the great benefits we have received through the agency of Wiclif, none can compare with our English Bible. This has not always

been duly acknowledged. Foxe, who gives an account of Wiclif in some respects remarkably full, makes no reference to his having translated the Word of God from the Vulgate into the English tongue.

Some of Wiclif's works were addressed chiefly, if not altogether, to his own generation. But he was destined by Providence to render one great service, not to his contemporaries alone, but to those who were to come after him. The study of Scripture had been with him an absorbing and congenial study during the greater part of his life. It was from the Bible that he had learned that purity of religious faith by which he was signalised above other great and good men of his day. When he protested against Church abuses or against such institutions as the mendicant orders, he took his stand upon the sufficiency and supreme authority of Holy Writ. Each year strengthened his conviction that the only satisfactory solution of controversies lay in an appeal to Scripture.

His later works are remarkable for the pointed and conclusive manner in which the Word of God is quoted. The question must have presented itself again and again to his mind when he was appealing to his English readers as to the Scriptural authority for some doctrine or practice, How could the laity judge of such matters? How could they acquaint themselves with the Word, when that Word as yet existed not in their own tongue?

When Wiclif first conceived the design of giving to his countrymen the Book of books, we do not know. He preached upon Scripture and published his sermons and expositions. He referred to Scripture in his controversial writings. He felt the need of Scripture to form his own beliefs and to regulate his own life; and he perceived that what he needed himself was equally necessary for others. As his attention was drawn away from the scenes and occupations of active life, as he gradually came to realise that his mission was pre-eminently spiritual, it could not but be that the Divine Word should present itself to him as the great gift which God had bestowed upon him, and which God intended him to be the means of conferring upon the English people. Of course the Bible was not, up to Wiclif's day, utterly unknown. Partial translations and¹ paraphrases of Scripture had been produced in the

Anglo-Saxon language. The labours of Cædmon, of Bede, of Alfred, and of Ælfric cannot be mentioned without gratitude. And as the English tongue underwent great changes, there arose learned and able men who translated portions of Scripture, especially the Psalms and the Gospels, into the idiom "understood of the people." The metrical version of the Gospels and the Acts, known as the Ormolum, is but the most elaborate and best known of many reproductions of certain Books of the Canon in our English speech during the thirteenth century. But it is now accepted as an historical certainty that no complete translation of the Bible had been published, and, indeed, that none had been made, before the time of Wiclif.

The following passages have been quoted (by Eadie) from Wiclif's writings, as proving the earnestness with which he desired the Book of God to be put into the hands of his fellow-countrymen:—"All secular men ought to know the faith; so it is to be taught them in whatever language is best known to them." "Christ and His Apostles converted the world by making known the truths of Scripture in a form familiar to them." "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 fully known."

“Christian men and women, old and young, should study first in the New Testament, should cleave to the study of it; and no simple man of wit, no man of small knowledge, should be afraid to study immeasurably in the sacred text.” “The sacred Scriptures are the property of the people, and one which no party should be allowed to wrest from them.”

That Romanist authors considered Wiclif to have been the first translator of the Sacred Volume into English is evident from the language used by Knighton, the chronicler, who was the Reformer's contemporary:—“The Gospel which Christ delivered to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might themselves sweetly administer to the laity and to the weaker persons with the hunger of their mind, according to the exigency of the times and the need of persons, did this Master John Wycliffe translate out of Latin into English . . . whence through him it became vulgar and more open to the laity and women who could read than it used to be to the most learned clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding . . . And in this way the gospel pearl is cast abroad and trodden under foot of swine, and that which used to be precious to both clergy and laity is rendered, as it were, the common jest of both. The jewel of the clergy is turned into the

sport of the laity, and what was hitherto the principal talent of the clergy and doctors of the Church is made for ever common to the laity.”

The translation of the Scriptures into English was a great work, not only because of the numerous and varied contents of the Sacred Volume, but also because Wiclif and his colleagues were pioneers, who had not the advantage possessed by those later translators who had before them the work of predecessors. Great diligence must have been used, for the work was completed in a very few years. It is agreed, by those who have studied the matter, that the whole of the New Testament was the work of Wiclif himself, and was completed not later than 1382, perhaps as early as 1380. The Old Testament was translated by Nicholas Hereford up to a certain passage in the Book of Baruch, from which point the Reformer himself seems to have taken up the task, and, probably with help, to have brought it to completion. After Wiclif's death, his curate and colleague, Purvay, revised the whole, finishing his undertaking in the year 1388.

According to the learned editors of this Bible, Forshall and Madden, “the Bible thus completed by Purvay caused the earlier translation to fall into disuse. The new version was eagerly sought after and read. Copies passed into the hands of all classes

of the people. Even the sovereign himself, and princes of the blood royal, did not disdain to possess them. The volumes were in many instances executed in a costly manner, and were usually written upon vellum by experienced scribes." Whilst the opulent purchased the whole volume, people of smaller means were thankful to possess portions of the Sacred Word. It is a proof of the value set upon the English Bible, that in times when copies could only be multiplied by the laborious and expensive process of manual transcription, a very large number were circulated throughout the country. The editors above quoted inform us that nearly 150 manuscripts, containing the whole or parts of Purvay's Bible, were examined by them, of which they have good reason to believe that the majority were written within forty years of its first appearance. As we know that in the fifteenth century the ecclesiastical authorities used every effort to discover and to destroy all copies of this work which they could hear of, and as we cannot doubt that many manuscripts must have perished by accident and by fire, we are compelled to believe that the number of copies produced by the scribes must have been exceedingly large, and that the appetite for the Word of God, the Bread of Life, must have been general and keen.

Some curious and convincing proofs of the esteem in which the earliest English Bible was held are still extant. For instance, there is in existence a vellum copy of Wiclif's translation, made about 1430, in which a paper is stitched, inscribed with the following simple and affecting lines :—

"Sethen I know my lyf is short,
 And that my book and I must part,
 to you, my dear and faythful frend,
 My chefest juel I doo comend.
 "Your pooer and faythful frend in the Lord,
 "ELYZABETH TYRWHYT."

There are very noticeable differences between the earlier and the later of the two Wiclifite versions of the Bible. It is not easy to account for the fact, that although executed within ten years of each other, these versions should so differ, that the latter should be so decidedly more modern than that of which it was a revision. Wiclif was a Yorkshireman, and at the time of translating was advanced in life; Purvay was a Southerner and a much younger man, and his English, accordingly, would naturally correspond with the Midland English of the time of Richard II. The earlier rendering is more literal, the later more idiomatic, and the later substitutes, in some cases, more modern for antiquated terms.

The following specimens of the earlier and later versions of the same passage show the superior intelligibility to us,

and, indeed, the more idiomatic character, of the later:—

PSALM CIII. 12.

Earlier Version—

“Hou myche the rising stant fro the going doun; aferr he made fro us oure wickidnessis.”

Later Version—

“As myche as the east is fer fro the west; he made fer oure wickidnessis fro us.”

PSALM CVII. 5.

Earlier Version—

“Hungrende and thirstende; the soule of hem in hem failide.”

Later Version—

“Thei weren hungri and thirsti; her soule failide in hem.”

It may be interesting to the reader to compare further the earlier and later Wiclifite versions. It will be apparent at a glance, that although issued within a few years of the original translation, the revised version, attributed to Purvay, has marked differences from that which appeared in Wiclif's lifetime. A few verses from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy will enable the reader to make a comparison between the versions of 1380 and 1388:—

First Version.

“Al maundement that I comaunde to thee to day be war bisili that thou doo, that 3e mowen lyue, and that ye ben multiplied, and goon yn, 3e weelden the loond, for the which the Lord hath sworn to 3oure fadres. And thou shalt recorde of al the

weie, bi the which the Lord thi God hath lad thee fourti wintir, bi deseert, that he traueyle thee, and tempte; and weren knowun that in thin inwitte weren styryd whether thou woldist kepe the heestis of hym, or noo. He trauelde thee with scarsenes, and 3af to thee meet manna, the which unknewe thou, and thi fadres, that he shewe to thee, that not in oonly breed lyueth man, but in eche word of God, that goth out of the mouth of the Lord.”

Second Version.

“Be thou war diligentli, that thou do ech comaundment which Y comaunde to thee to dai, that 3e moun lyue, and be multiplied, and that 3e entre, and welde the lond, for which the Lord swor to 3oure fadris. And thou schalt haue mynde of al the weie, bi which thi Lord God ledde thee by fourti 3eer, bi deseert, that he schulde turmente, and schulde tempte thee; and that tho thingis that werin tretid in thi soule schulden be knowun, whether thou woldist kepe hise comaundementis, ethir nay. And he turmentide thee with nedynesse, and he 3af to thee meete, manna which thou knewist not, and thi fadris knewen not, that he schulde schewe to thee that a man lyueth not in breed aloone, but in ech word that cometh out of the Lordis mouth” (*From Forshall and Madden's Edition*).

A few other specimens shall be subjoined:—

MATTHEW V. 3—12.

“Blessid ben pore men in spirit, for the kyngdom of heuenes is herne. Blessid ben mylde men, for thei schulen welde the erthe. Blessid ben thei that moornen, for thei schulen be coumfortid. Blessid ben thei that hungren and thristen rijtwisnesse, for thei schulen be fulfillid. Blessid ben mer-

ciful men, for thei schulen gete merci. Blessid ben thei that ben of clene herte, for thei schulen se God. Blessid ben pesible men, for thei schulen be clepid Goddis children. Blessid ben thei that suffren persecusioun for riȝtfulnesse, for the kingdom of heuenes is herne. ȝe schulen be blessid, whanne men schulen curse you, and schulen pursue ȝou, and shulen seie al yuel aȝens you liynge, for me. Ioie ȝe, and be ȝe glad, for ȝoure meede is plenteuouse in heuenes; for so thei han pursued also profetis that weren bifor ȝou."

LUKE X. 30—35.

"A man cam doun fro Jerusalem in to Jerico, and fel among theues, and thei robbiden hym, and woundiden hym, and wente aweie, and leften the man half alyue. And it bifel that a prest cam doun the same weie and passide forth, whanne he hadde seyn hym. Also a dekene, whanne he was bisidis the place, and saiȝ hym, passide forth. But a Samaritan, goynge the weie, cam bisidis hym; and he siȝ hym, and hadde reuthe on hym; and cam to hym, and boonde togidir hise woundis, and held in oyle and wyne; and leide hym on his beest, and ledde in to an ostrie, and dide the cure of hym. And another dai he brouȝte forth twey pans, and ȝaf to the ostiler, and seide, Hauē the cure of hym, and what euer thou schalt ȝyue ouer; Y schalt ȝelde to thee, whanne Y come aȝen."

The above are from Purvay's later Version (1388), as in Forshall and Madden's edition.

MATTHEW VI. 9—14.

"Oure fadir that art in heuenes, halowid be thi name, thi kingdom come to, be thi wille don in erthe as in heuene, ȝeue to us this day oure breed *our other sub-*

stance, and forgeue to vs oure dettis, as we forȝeuen to our dettouris, and lede us not in to temptacioun: but delyuer us from yuel amen."

I CORINTHIANS XIII.

"If I speke with tungis of men and of aungels, and I haue not charite, I am made as bras sownynge or a cymbal tinkynge, and if I haue profecie, and knowe alle mysteries, and al kynnynges, and if I haue al feith so that I meue hillis fro her place and I haue not charite I am nouȝt, and if I departe alle my godis in to metis of pore men, and if I bitake my bodi so that I brenne, and I haue not charite it profetith to me no thing, charite is pacient, it is benyngne,

"charite enuyeth not, it doth not wickidli it is not blowun it is not coueitous, it sekith not tho thingis that ben his owne, it is not stired to wraththe, it thenkith not yuel, it ioieth not on wickidnesse, but it ioieth to gidre to truthe, it suffriȝ alle thingis: it bileueth alle thingis, it hopith all thingis, it susteyneth alle thingis, charite fallith neuer doun, whether profecies schuln be voided, ether langagis schulen ceese: ether science shal be distried,

"for aparti we knowen and aparti we profecien, but whanne that schal come that is perfyt, that thing that is of parti schal be avoided, whanne I was a litil child I spake as a litil child, I vnderstood as a litil child, I thought as a litil child, but whanne I was made a man I voided tho thingis that weren of a litil child, and we seen now bi a myrroure in derknesse: but thanne face to face, now I knowe of parti, but thanne I schal knowe as I am knowen, and now dwellen feith hope and charite, these thre: but the moost of thes is charite."

The last two specimens are as in

Bagster's *Hexapla*, for which a MS. of the later version was used.

The question has often occurred to the student of Wiclif's life and work, How came it to pass, that notwithstanding the deep impression evidently made by this the first of the reformers, and notwithstanding the extensive circulation of the English Bible, Roman Catholicism maintained its ground in this country for a century and a half at least after Wiclif's death? How can it be accounted for that Protestantism, in England at all events, did not earlier arise and assert its great and vital principles of the authority of Scripture and the responsibility of the individual? To explain this difficulty, we have to bear in mind that, so far as Wiclif's work was regarded with sympathy by those in high places, it was because that work was the assertion of national independence, and a protest against the encroachments, the avarice, the corruptions of Rome. And if the Scriptures in the hands of the people did not produce the impression which might have been expected, it must be remembered that very many of those who studied the English Bible were, perhaps in virtue of that very independence of character and disdain of authority which led to such study, associated with the political and social extravagances of that period. And, further, it

must not be lost sight of, that in this country the fifteenth century was marked by civil wars and distractions which rent the nation asunder, and turned attention away from intellectual and spiritual interests to those purely political.

Still, it is known that the study of Wiclif's version of the Bible contributed to the religious life of the people, and by sustaining individual piety and diffusing Scriptural knowledge, prepared the way for the Reformation. With this great event of the sixteenth century, the early version of the Bible was most closely connected, inasmuch as this furnished, as is certainly known, the model upon which the new translation by Tyndale—that from the original languages—was based and constructed.

Many persons devoted themselves to the occupation of transcribing Wiclif's version of the Scriptures, and no doubt found in this occupation the means of a sufficient livelihood. One result of this was that the Bible was marvelously cheapened. Twenty years before the time of the Reformer's labours, two Irish students spent two years in Oxford, and during that time were not able to meet with and to purchase a Latin Bible. Fifty years after Wiclif's death, a copy of the New Testament might be bought for four marks and forty pence, which sum, however,

was at that time worth far more than at present, being a year's salary for a curate.

Too grateful the English people cannot be for Wiclif's labours; he first gave them the Book which has made them all they are of great or good.

"Of the Book that had been a sealed-up book,
He tore the clasps, that the nation,
With eyes unbandaged, might thereon look,
And learn to read salvation.

"To the death 'twas thine to persevere,
Though the tempest around thee rattled,
And wherever falsehood was lurking, there
Thy heroic spirit battled.

"A light was struck,—a light which showed
How hideous were Error's features,
And how perverted the law bestowed
By Heaven to guide its creatures.

"At first, for that spark, amidst the dark,
The friar his fear dissembled;
But soon at the fame of Wiclif's name
The throne of St. Peter trembled."



CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST ASSAULT UPON WICLIF, THROUGH HIS DOCTRINES AND HIS ADHERENTS.

IT has been already shown that in the summer of 1381, Wiclif promulgated at Oxford his Theses against Transubstantiation, and so drew upon himself the hatred of all the Papal party. He could not have expected to carry with him on to this doctrinal ground many who had been his cordial and admiring supporters in his attacks upon the corruptions and upon the policy of Rome. It is known that John of Gaunt no longer befriended him, and even when appealed to for protection, urged the reformer to silence upon this theological question. The rebellion of the peasants must have led those in authority to look with some suspicion upon all innovations. Still, though Wiclif was prohibited from teaching in the university his doctrines upon the Eucharist, he continued to teach them by his pen,

and his immediate friends and disciples took every opportunity of promulgating them at Oxford and elsewhere.

The outlook for Wiclif and for his doctrines grew blacker when Courtenay came to the primacy; for Courtenay had been the Reformer's most powerful enemy, and, no doubt, when he was Bishop of London, had denounced him to the Pope. But when Sudbury was slain by the rebels in the frightful insurrection of the summer of 1381, Courtenay was appointed to the archbishopric. And he was not a man to neglect his opportunities, or to leave his opponents time to gather strength. In the early part of the following year he summoned an assembly of divines—bishops and doctors of law and divinity—to examine the tenets of Wiclif, meaning first to censure the doctrines and

then to attack their upholders. This assembly met at the Blackfriars, and its proceedings were marked by an earthquake, which the president represented as a good omen, and which Wiclif commemorated by terming this assembly the "Earthquake Synod." There was no difficulty in such a convention in securing a condemnation of the Wiclifite tenets. Twenty-four were enumerated, of which ten were characterized as heretical and the rest as erroneous. In the former category were included the views upon the Eucharist which Wiclif had lately advocated most strenuously on every occasion and in every manner. In the same class are found the paradox that "God ought to obey the devil," the statement that a wicked priest or pope possesses no valid powers, and the declaration that it would be well that Urban VI. should be the last of the popes.

This remarkable synod was brought to a close by a penitential procession through the streets of London, and by a sermon denunciatory of heresy, and a public recitation of the doctrines censured and condemned. These proceedings make it evident that the rebellion against Rome was regarded as no trifling matter; it was thought urgently necessary to employ in order to suppress it all the means at the command of the highest ecclesiastical authorities in the land.

In accordance with the judgment of the synod, the Archbishop issued a mandate to the University of Oxford condemning the twenty-four Theses, and forbidding any person to teach or maintain the condemned doctrines, under pain of excommunication. A somewhat similar mandate was also sent to the bishops, with a view to the prohibition of the publication of heresy and error in their dioceses.

But this was not enough: the persecutors needed power to enforce their decrees. Courtenay persuaded the young King and the peers to agree to an edict, which bore the semblance of a statute, but which was not such, having never been submitted to the Commons, and which the Commons afterwards required to be effaced from the statute book. The purport of this edict was to authorise the civil power to carry out the designs of the hierarchy against the heretics. The end was to some extent secured by a patent, signed by the sovereign, empowering the episcopate to apprehend by their own officers and to imprison all supporters of the Theses which had been condemned as heretical.

Courtenay's way was now clear, and he proceeded at once to action. The university was the head-quarters of heresy, and it was in Oxford that the work of repression was commenced. There were two parties in the univer-

sity ; for whilst a large section sided with the bishops and friars, the Reformer also numbered many ardent adherents. But might was on the side of the persecutors. The Chancellor, Dr. Rigge, favoured the Wiclifites. Hereford, Wiclif's colleague in Bible translation, Repington, a scholar and preacher, Aston, and Bedeman, were marked men. The Chancellor was overborne ; and after much resistance, all the Wiclifites, with the exception of Hereford, were brought to recant. The determined measures of the Archbishop met with a speedy apparent success. So far as outward appearance went, in a few months Wiclifism at Oxford was suppressed. Hereford fled to Rome, where he was imprisoned for several years ; and Wiclif, who alone of the party was unmolested, gave himself henceforth to parochial and literary work.

That Convocation met at Oxford in November of this year is not doubtful, and it has been assumed and asserted that Wiclif was summoned and appeared on this occasion before the Provincial Synod. But although, on the one hand, it has been said that the Reformer defended his opinions with vigour and ability before this body, and, on the other hand, that he made a recantation, there seems no trustworthy evidence either way. Those who claimed that Wiclif recanted

quoted his well-known Confession in support of that contention ; but in fact this document dates from the previous year, and so far from being a recantation, is a statement and exposition of his special doctrine !

But what Wiclif did towards the close of 1382 was this,—he presented a memorial or complaint to Parliament, by means of which he put himself in the position not of defendant, but of prosecutor. He recognized the supremacy of the State, and appealed to the true representatives and rulers of the nation against ecclesiastical rigidity and assumption. Herein lay his own safety and liberty, in the sympathy of laymen with his honesty, his fearlessness, his disdain of professional tribunals. The supremacy of the State over the Church as an institution is, in every land, essential to liberty ; and the hierarchy knew that if they took active proceedings against Wiclif, they would have to match themselves with the Commons of England in parliament. In his memorial he claimed that members of religious orders should be at liberty to relinquish their monastic mode of life. He claimed that the State should exercise control over the property of the Church and of ecclesiastics. And he protested against the inculcation upon the nation of the modern and monstrous dogma of Transubstantiation. This was indeed

carrying the war into the enemy's country. We can only surmise what must have been the effect of Wiclif's complaint, and deem it likely that his

bold attitude had something to do with the prudence exhibited by the hierarchy in leaving the Reformer to end his days in peace.



CHAPTER XIII.

WICLIF'S LAST DAYS AND DEATH.

“Once more the Church is seized with sudden fear,
And at her call is Wiclif disinhumed ;
Yea, his dry bones to ashes are consumed,
And flung into the brook that travels near ;
Forthwith that ancient Voice which streams
can hear
Thus speaks (that Voice which walks upon the
wind,
Though seldom heard by busy humankind)—
As thou these ashes, little brook, wilt bear
Into the Avon, Avon to the tide
Of Severn, Severn to the narrow seas,
Into main ocean they, this deed accursed,
An emblem yields to friends and enemies,
How the bold Teacher's doctrine, sanctified
By truth, shall spread, throughout the world
dispersed.”

OUR great Reformer did not live to be an old man. His life was all through filled with severe and almost unremitting toil. And the last few years of his career were years not only of great labour, but of great excitement. It is evident that from 1378 until the day of his death, he was exerting himself to the utmost to secure the enlightenment and the spiritual enfranchisement of his countrymen. Until 1381 his time was probably divided chiefly between Ox-

ford and Lutterworth ; after that date he seems to have confined himself to his own Leicestershire parish. That he lectured in the university until the very hour that he was silenced is a matter of historical certainty. And after this path of service was closed to him, he was by no means condemned to silence and inactivity. He still discharged his parochial duties, preaching in his parish church, and visiting his flock. He probably continued to work upon his English Bible ; for we cannot suppose that he could cease studying the Scriptures in the form in which he had given them to his nation, and we do not know what material Purvay may have acquired from his master in preparation for his revision. He had about him at Lutterworth some congenial spirits. Among these was John Horn, a young man, whom he employed as his curate in the parish, and Purvay, who revised his master's Bible, and prepared what may be termed the second edition, that of 1388.

Perhaps the chief work Wiclif performed during the last three years of his life must be sought in the Latin and English treatises and pamphlets which proceeded from his unrelenting pen. The reader of the volumes in which the Reformer's smaller works have been brought together cannot but be struck with the fact that the bulk of them bear traces of having been composed towards the close of his life. Many of them refer to Spencer's crusade in Flanders, which took place in the summer of 1383, only a year and a half before Wiclif's sudden death. And others of them must, because of the advanced views they take of doctrinal topics, be referred to the same period. It is evident that when Wiclif could no longer carry on his work as he had been wont to do by his voice, he all the more devoted himself to literature. And perhaps his country and the world have been the gainers by the very success of his enemies in silencing his voice at Oxford.

There happened in the year 1383 an event which aroused Wiclif's deepest indignation. The warlike Bishop of Norwich seems to have been indulging his own propensities as well as displaying his devotion to the Italian pope in undertaking a crusade against Clement VII. England was committed to the cause of Urban, and

the archbishop sanctioned the bold enterprise of Bishop Spencer. Prayers, processions, collections, all the ecclesiastical machinery, were set in motion in order to arouse the sympathy, liberality, and chivalry of the English people, on behalf of this somewhat Quixotic undertaking. The patriotic were urged to strike a blow at France; the pious were invited to purchase pardon for their own souls, and release from purgatory for their deceased friends. Thus men and money were forthcoming, and in the summer of the year, the bishop led his crusading host to Flanders. At first the invaders met with some success, but before long reverses overtook them, and their return at the close of the summer was ignominious indeed.

All this pained Wiclif, and roused his holy wrath. The spectacle of two popes, each professing to be Vicar of Christ on earth, yet engaging in warfare with mutual hate, and involving destruction to multitudes of Christian lives, was in itself distressing; but the sorrow and shame were aggravated by the participation in this disgraceful strife of a host of his fellow-countrymen, encouraged by episcopal exhortation and example. No wonder that Wiclif wrote a powerful treatise in condemnation of the whole proceeding; and no wonder that those of his writings which were produced during

the last year and a half of his life abound with references to proceedings which both impoverished the country and hindered the progress of the Gospel.

Wiclif regarded Spencer's crusade as a sin and scandal, and denounced the campaign in language of unsparing severity. "Antichrist," said he, "puts many thousand lives in danger for his own wretched life. Why, is he not a fiend stained foul with homicide who, though a priest, fights in such a cause?"

It has been generally believed that in this same year, 1383, Wiclif was summoned to appear before the Pope, and that he excused himself on the ground of bodily infirmity. There is no foundation for this belief other than exists in a document, which seems to be addressed, not to the Pope, but rather to his own friends. The language of this document is consistent with the supposition that he had been summoned to Rome, but does not certainly imply that this had been the case. He expresses an opinion that the Pope should renounce worldly lordship. "And if," he adds, "I erre in this sentence, I will mekely be amendid, hif by the death, hif it be skilful, for that I hope were gode to me. And if I might traveile in my own porsoun, I wolde with God's will go to the pope. Bot [Christ] has nedid me to the contrary, and taught me more obeishe to God than to mon. And I suppose of

our Pope that he will not be Antichrist, and reverse Christ in this, wirking to the contrary of Christ's wilie."

There is documentary evidence that towards the close of 1382 Wiclif had been seized by a slight attack of paralysis; but it does not seem to have interfered in any way with his mental vigour or his literary activity. In the society of his friends, unmolested by his foes, engaged in the benevolent duties of his office, in the congenial ministrations of God's house, and in the composition of his sermons and tracts, he bravely toiled on, until the appointed day arrived when he should cease from labour. It was at the close of the year 1384 that the Reformer was summoned by that messenger whom all men must face to close his eloquent lips, and to lay down his unwearying pen. "A stroke of paralysis seized him in his parish church, in the course of the service, and he was borne out speechless. After lingering for three days, he breathed his last upon the closing day of the year 1384.

The malice of Wiclif's enemies appears in the language used by the chronicler Walsingham with reference to the reformer's death:—"In the ninth yere of this kyng, John Wiclif, the orgon of the devel, the enemy of the Cherch, the confusion of men, the ydol of heresie, the meroure of ypocrisie, the norischer of scisme, be the rithful dome

of God, was smet with a horibil paralise threwoute his body." And another chronicler remarks that this "judgment" was very manifest and unmistakable, because the day on which Wiclif was smitten was the day of St. Thomas à Becket, and the day on which he died was the day of St. Silvester, two saints whom the arch-heretic had treated with contempt!

In the tomb where the Reformer's bones were laid, the malice of his enemies suffered them to rest only for a season. A decree of the Council of Constance, in the year 1415, commanded that the body of the arch-heretic should be disinterred, his bones burnt, and his ashes scattered abroad. This sentence was executed in the year 1425; the ashes of Wiclif were cast into the running brook, and, as Foxe remarks, the body was transformed into earth, fire, and water, three of the elements. The quaint remarks of Fuller upon this transaction have often been quoted, and are worth transcribing:—

"Now such the spleen of the Council of Constance, as they not only cursed his memory, as dying an obstinate heretic, but ordered that his bones (with this charitable caution, if it may be discerned from the bones of other faithful people) to be taken out of the ground, and thrown far off from any Christian burial. In obedience whereunto Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln, Diocesan of Lutterworth, sent his officers (vultures with a quick sight and scent at a dead carcase) to ungrave him accordingly. To Lutterworth they come, sumner, commissarie, official, chancellor, proctors, doctors, and the servants . . . took what was left out of the grave, and burnt them to ashes, and cast them into Swift, a neighbouring brook running hard by. Thus this brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wiclif are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."



CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOLLARDS.

THE name "Lollard" was first applied to a sect or society that arose in the Netherlands at the very beginning of the fourteenth century. They were akin to the Fraticelli and the Beghards, orders of Christians much out of sympathy with the views and habits then prevalent in the Church. Their occupation was to attend the sick and dying. The name has been derived from a supposed Walter Lollard, who is said to have been burned at Cologne in 1322, or from a supposed Matthew Lollaert, of Holland. But these are not historical personages. Looking about for an etymology, some have fixed upon the Latin *lolium*, "tares," as the derivation of the word. After all, it perhaps comes from the old verb *lollen*, or *lullen*, to sing softly, as some think, possibly through a Latinized form of *loller*, namely *lollardus*.

The designation was applied to the

party of Wiclif in 1382 by a Cistercian monk, Henry Crompton, preaching before the university of Oxford; but it is said that the earliest official use of the term in this application occurs in a mandate of the Bishop of Worcester, in 1387, in which the Wiclifites are thus designated, *nomine seu ritu Lollardorum confederatos*.

Lollardy represented a great principle,—the spirit of resistance to the worldly mediæval idea of the Church,—the spirit that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries impelled men to revert to the primeval Christian type. It is not at all surprising that we find great variety both of belief and of character among those denominated by this general name. A very learned student of this period has put this fact in very strong language, which, however, seems justified by the records of the time: "Under the common name of 'Lollards' was gathered every

species of malcontent. Restless fanatics like Swynderby, with whom Wiclifism was but one of a series of religious excitements; Crompe, whose only crime was a bitter hostility to the mendicant orders, which the times gave an excuse for treating as a heresy; socialist preachers like John Ball; adventurers like Peter Payne, were all united in popular, or at least clerical, estimation with the genuine disciples of John Wiclif" (Shirley).

Wiclif, himself a great philosopher, in dealing with the contrast between the ideal Church and what he actually saw, took his stand upon Scripture, and upon his theory of "Dominion" based upon Scripture. It was not to be expected that his moderation should be imitated by all his professed followers. Yet it is most unfair to represent the Wiclifites as being accountable for the turbulence and commotions which characterised the latter part of the fourteenth century.

Although Roman Catholic historians, and even some modern Anglican writers, have asserted that Wiclif and his preachers and his books are to be regarded as answerable for the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381, there is no countenance in any ancient authority for such a charge. Singularly enough, some of the chroniclers blame the

mendicant orders for the uprising; Jack Straw himself confessed that the rebels aimed at pulling down the hierarchy and putting the friars in their place; John Ball was stigmatized as the forerunner, not the follower of Wiclif. The Commons of England attributed the disaffection which led to the insurrection in question to the heavy pressure of taxation upon the poor, and to the maladministration of the law. And the villeins and serfs who rebelled were not the class reached by the teaching of Wiclif, whose adherents were chiefly among the townspeople and the craftsmen. Wiclif himself had many disciples among the clergy, and was a favourite at Court, and he had powerful protectors in members of the royal family. It is well known that Wiclif inculcated loyalty, obedience, and order as the civil duty of Christians.

It is considered that the Lollards flourished most vigorously during the ten years which followed Wiclif's death. A saying of Knighton's is often quoted, that every second man met with was a Lollard*; but it is to be remembered that the chronicler wrote in Leicestershire, the county which was the scene of Wiclif's labours, and in

* The Lollards themselves estimated their numbers at one hundred thousand persons, a large proportion of the people; but it is known that the statistics of that age deserve little credit.

which he spent the whole of the last three years of his life. The simple priests, who were the Methodists of their time, and who made it their life-work to evangelize their native land, enjoyed the support and confidence of some men of rank and power. In the University of Oxford were many favourers of the reformed doctrines, as Courtenay had been quick-witted enough to perceive when his minion, Stokes, assured him that he was afraid to publish the archbishop's mandate against Wiclif's "errors." Amongst the supporters of the Lollards were Lord Montacute, Lord Salisbury, and Sir Thomas Latimer.

It was no doubt very much to the advantage of the Lollards that they enjoyed the countenance of Anne of Bohemia, the consort of King Richard II. She was a diligent student of the Scriptures, not only in the Vulgate, but in her native Bohemian and in the English versions.

In 1394, King Richard was recalled from Ireland by the voice of the prelates, who professed to be alarmed at a projected rising of the Lollards in London, where the sect was numerous and powerful.

In the year 1395, the Lollard movement seems to have reached its greatest height. The Lollards must have been numerous and powerful to have gathered confidence enough for the

step which they took in this year. They petitioned parliament, through Sir Thomas Latimer and Sir R. Stury, to reform the Church of England in accordance with their Lollard principles. If it is asked what, definitely stated, these principles were, we are referred for answer to the "Lollard Conclusions," which are known to have affirmed that "temporal possessions ruin the Church, and drive out the Christian graces of faith, hope, and charity; that the priesthood of the Church in communion with Rome was not the priesthood Christ gave to His apostles; that the monks' vow of celibacy had for its consequence unnatural lust, and should not be imposed; that Transubstantiation was a feigned miracle, and led people to idolatry; that prayers made over wine, bread, water, oil, salt, wax, incense, altars of stone, church walls, vestments, mitres, crosses, staves, were magical, and should not be allowed; that kings should possess the *jus episcopale*, and bring good government into the Church; that no special prayers should be made for the dead; that auricular confession made to the clergy, and declared to be necessary for salvation, was the root of clerical arrogance and the cause of indulgences and other abuses in pardoning sin; that all wars were against the principles of the New Testament, and were but murdering and plundering

the poor to win glory for kings; that the vows of chastity laid upon nuns led to child-murder; that many of the trades practised in the commonwealth, such as those of goldsmiths and armourers, were unnecessary, and led to luxury and waste."

It was also held by the Lollards that the principal duty of priests is to preach, and that the worship of images and going on pilgrimages is sinful.

People holding such opinions as these were people whom the Church of Rome could not tolerate, to whom that Church could give no quarter. The opportunity for her to fulfil her worst wishes came with the accession of the House of Lancaster to the throne of England. Henry IV. was son of John of Gaunt; the father had protected Wiclif, the son persecuted Wiclif's followers. It was the policy of the new king to conciliate and to support the Church by whose influence, in great measure, he had been enabled to usurp the crown. To what extremes Henry was willing to go in this direction may be judged from a similitude he employed in a royal speech, comparing the commonwealth to a body of which the Church was the right side, the king the left, whilst the lay subjects constituted the remaining members!

Of such a king, of Arundel as an

archbishop, and of a House of Commons opposed, indeed, to clerical abuses, but inclined to the repression of religious independence, the infamous statute, *De heretico comburendo*, was indeed worthy. Now for the first time in English history it was made legal to put men to death for professing and teaching what was called heresy. Before the passing of this statute, men had been called to account for their opposition to the doctrines of the Church or the practices of the hierarchy, as may be seen in the accounts preserved by Foxe of the examination and imprisonment of Swinderby and Brute. But half-measures were found ineffectual. The Act for burning heretics was wisely chosen for the nefarious end in view. No time was lost in making an example which should show how earnest and determined were the authorities. In the very same year, 1401, died the first man who perished for Protestantism on English soil, a priest named Sautree. Although, in the course of his trial, this man was weak enough to recant and to lie, he bore himself bravely at the last, when, after degradation from his orders, "on a high place in public, before the face of the people," he was burned. In this same year, Purvay, Wiclif's assistant, was apprehended.

It has been disputed whether or not

the University of Oxford testified, in the year 1406, in favour of Wiclif's doctrines. The document in which this professed testimony is borne was repudiated at the time; but, singularly enough, the primate, Arundel, treated it as genuine, and based upon it an admonition addressed to the university.

In 1408, Arundel passed in Convocation his famous "Constitutions." These were directed against unauthorized preachers, especially the Wiclifite preaching priests; against the utterance of any words of rebuke addressed to the clergy; and against the circulation and perusal of Lollard books, and of the Lollard translation of the Bible.

The martyrologist has told, graphically and touchingly, the story of the end of the Lollard Badbee. He was a poor tailor of the diocese of Worcester, who, for the crime of denying the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation, was tried in London, in the year 1409, by a court of prelates and ministers of state. He asserted in the plainest terms, and supported by the boldest arguments, the Protestant view of the Eucharist. Arundel's exhortations and persuasions were all lost on this unwavering confessor of Gospel truth, and he was condemned to die. The so-called heretic was taken to Smithfield, placed in a barrel, and bound

with iron chains. The "host" was brought forward in pomp by the Prior of St. Bartholomew's; but though the crowd bowed down before the supposed sacrifice, Badbee's spirit was unbent. The flames were kindled, and as the fiery tongues licked his body, the martyr, as drawing near to the tribunal of the Divine Judge, uttered a cry for "mercy." The Prince of Wales was present, and misunderstanding the exclamation, commanded that the fire should be removed, whilst he urged the poor victim to recant, and promised him a pension. But Badbee's undaunted spirit had no clemency to ask from men. He was again thrust into the blazing cask, put on the garment of flame, and then passed away to assume the robe of victory.

In the reigns of the Lancastrian kings, Lollardy was professedly dreaded and persecuted, because of the supposed revolutionary leanings of some of its adherents. The Church hated the freedom of thought in which the movement originated, and which the movement promoted; but the pretext by which the Church induced the State to persecute was the pretext that the Lollards were rebels. Such charges must be regarded with suspicion. The reign of that valiant soldier, Henry V., was disgraced by continued persecution. Like his father, he wished to be on good terms with the powerful prelates

of the realm. In the chronicles of this reign we read of threats of insurrection posted on church doors, of midnight assemblies of conspirators; but it was not proved that the Lollards, as a religious body, were responsible for what alarmed the authorities. Still, in some way, the alarm was excited. It was expressed in the apprehension and martyrdom of the great leader of the Lollard party, Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham. This remarkable man was hanged on a gallows, with a fire at his feet, by which his body was slowly consumed. He thus died the double death of traitor and heretic. That he was a disbeliever in Roman superstition is undoubted; that he was disloyal to his country and his sovereign no satisfactory evidence was brought forward to show. But "the times were out of joint," and in Oldcastle there perished a true patriot and valiant soldier, whose sin was that he was faithful to his highest convictions. His story teaches a lesson which all history repeats: a tragic doom overtakes those ardent spirits whose ambition it is to "set right" a world not yet ripe for reformation.

After the Council of Constance had taken steps to dishonour Wiclif's memory, to dishearten Wiclif's followers, to repress Wiclif's doctrines, the measures taken against Lollardy upon its most congenial soil were terribly

rigorous. Bohemia and England witnessed the severest persecutions. In our country the advocates of religious enlightenment and freedom could no longer speak from the pulpits of the churches or from the chairs of the university. The Lollards were driven to hold secret meetings; they assembled in the lonely huts of the peasantry, in the "holes and corners of the earth," in saw-pits and ditches, that they might hear the Word of God read in their own tongue, and might listen to the exhortations of their beloved teachers.

These stringent measures were not without effect; yet they were not entirely successful. In 1428, Archbishop Chichele, who was a thorough Inquisitor, confessed that the Lollards were as numerous as ever. It seems that it was not only the laity who were infected by the new doctrines; rectors, curates, and chaplains were, in many instances, known to be in sympathy, if not in formal association, with the Lollard party. And Peckocke, in his *Repressor*, speaking of the "Bible-men," gives us an insight into their position, from which we infer that the Lollards were not much changed. The study of the Scriptures was by these lovers of evangelical truth kept up from generation to generation. And it has been fairly argued, that this interest in the Bible gave a

special character to the English Reformation of the sixteenth century; for among the earliest and truest signs that the darkness was passing away

was this, that the Scriptures were ably translated from the original Hebrew and Greek and fearlessly and widely circulated in our mother tongue.



CHAPTER XV.

THE FRUITS OF WICLIF'S TEACHING, ESPECIALLY IN BOHEMIA.

A MAN admittedly so great and good as Wiclif could not but exercise an influence beyond the limits of his native land. His intellectual supremacy in Oxford, the first university of Europe, gave him a power and gave his teaching an authority incalculable and unrivalled. And the writings which were the chief work of his latest years, and, indeed, of his life, found their way into every capital and into every university. Scotland early received the doctrines of Wiclif, and measures were taken in that land to prevent their spread. But it was upon the Continent, and especially in Bohemia, that the Wiclifite tenets spread most rapidly and gained the firmest footing.

Bohemia, both by its language and its religious history, was somewhat isolated from the rest of Western Christendom. During the second half of the fourteenth century, many zealous and fearless preachers arose (though it is noticeable that they were not all

Bohemians by birth), who testified in Prague against the autocracy of the pope, and against the corruptions of the Church. Their denunciations of ecclesiastical assumption, tyranny, avarice, pride, and licentiousness, were received by the Bohemians and by their sovereigns with approval. But though the names of Conrad, of Milicz, of Ranconis, and of John of Stekno must be mentioned with respect, they cannot be claimed as champions of reformation in the wider sense of that word. They witnessed against the abuses of the Church and the assumptions of Churchmen; but they did not attack established doctrines as erroneous when judged by the test of Scripture.

The controversy between the Bohemians and the Roman See turned largely upon usages with regard to the Lord's Supper. The Bohemians regarded the ordinance as one which the laity should observe frequently and upon equal terms with the clergy. Some of them were in favour of daily

communion, reviving what seemed to them a primitive usage. And they resented being deprived of the cup. So strongly did they insist upon the right of the laity to the chalice, that they became afterwards known as Calixtines, and they emblazoned the sacramental cup upon their battle-flags.

It is now established that the Reformation in Bohemia, so far as it was not a mere protest against corrupt practices, but a great theological revolution, was not a native growth of the Bohemian soil, but a transplantation from England. Wiclif was the true master of Huss and Jerome.

Several reasons may be given why Bohemia should, rather than other countries, have received as congenial soil the seed which Wiclif sowed by his ministry, and especially by his writings. When the young Queen Anne came over from Bohemia, she naturally brought some of her country-people in her train, and relations were thus opened up between the two kingdoms. And it is known that young Bohemian scholars came to Oxford as well as to Paris, for the purpose of enjoying the highest educational advantages, those two cities containing the most famous universities in Europe.

Amongst those young Bohemians who came to this country to carry on their studies at Oxford were Ranconis and Jerome. It was thus that Jerome

was brought into contact with the disciples of Wiclif, and became a student of the great Reformer's writings. He came to England in 1399, and, in the year 1401 or 2, he copied Wiclif's *Dialogus* and his more famous *Trialogus*, and sent or carried the manuscripts to Bohemia. It is a mistake to suppose that Faulfisch or Peter Payne were among the earliest to take Wiclif's works to Prague; the latter did not visit Bohemia until after 1415. But what Jerome did, there can be no doubt others did also. Wiclif's philosophical works were, as a matter of course, known at the University of Prague. Huss knew them well; there is in the library at Stockholm a volume containing five tracts of the English philosopher in Huss's handwriting.

By such channels as these many of the writings of our great English Reformer were carried into Bohemia. From the year 1403, and probably earlier, Wiclif's *Tractates* were well known, especially among the university scholars of Prague. John of Hussinetz, afterwards known as Huss, was a young priest of the highest character and of learning, who, on account of his eloquence and other qualifications, was, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, promoted to be preacher in the university chapel, called Bethlehem, and confessor to Queen Sophia. His public denunciations of the corruptions of the

Church and of the misconduct of many of the clergy directed towards him much clerical odium, from which he was only protected by royal appreciation and favour. Becoming acquainted with Wiclif's theological writings, Huss was at first prejudiced against them, but upon further study came to sympathise with many of the bold and novel principles they propounded. What he believed, Huss was not the man to withhold from those whom he taught. And his popularity increasing, his circle of influence constantly widened. He was, in 1402, made rector of the university, a position which secured him the attention of thousands of ardent and youthful minds.

The doctrines of Wiclif which laid firmest hold upon Huss were those relating to the Church. He believed and taught that mere official position in the ecclesiastical society is of no avail, unless there be true piety and Christlikeness on the part of the churchman, whether priest, bishop, or pope. He exalted the power of the king above that of the hierarchy. These tenets naturally made Huss very distasteful to the Church, as they had many years before alienated the English hierarchy from their first promulgator. The archbishop obtained from Rome powers to proceed against such teaching, and collected two hundred manuscripts of Wiclif's works, and publicly and

solemnly burned them in the court of the archbishop's palace on the Hradschin. But the intrepid preacher continued to inveigh against the abuses of the hierarchy, and especially against the indulgences, which were then and continued to be one of the chief scandals of the Church. Pope John summoned Huss to appear before him, but he could not be spared by king or people. He enjoyed the confidence and support of the nation at large. All this while Huss does not seem to have entered upon controversy on properly theological questions; especially he did not attack the current belief upon Transubstantiation.

Dr. Loserth has carefully compared the writings of Huss with those of Wiclif, taking up one point after another, with the result of establishing most conclusively that the Bohemian was indebted, through the whole range of his teaching, to his English predecessor. The subjects chiefly treated are those relating to the nature of the Church, the position of its officers and rulers, the principles of Church government, the papacy and the priesthood, predestination, sin, and forgiveness, and the doctrine of the Sacraments generally.

In comparing the views of Wiclif and Huss, two matters deserve special attention:—(1) The two reformers are agreed as to the authority of Holy Scripture, which both regard as the

true source and standard of Christian belief. The strength of the movement, both in England and in Bohemia, lay in this, that it was based upon the Bible, and upon the Bible as a people's book, to be read and studied in the vernacular. (2) Upon the Lord's Supper there was important diversity between the two reformers. Huss did not question the established doctrine of Transubstantiation. At his trial before the Council of Constance he indignantly repudiated the charge of "heresy" upon this point.

The Bohemians made a stand for the participation of the laity in the cup, which it had become customary to withhold from them. They fell back upon the decision of Pope Gelasius I., and considered that communion in one kind only constituted an incomplete Sacrament.

The story of Huss and Jerome of Prague is one of the most pathetic in history. The Council of Constance might be divided upon many points; they were united in the hatred of liberty of thought, in the resolve to crush the rising spirit of reform. They wreaked their vengeance on the dead in condemning Wiclif's doctrines and in disinterring his bones. But Wiclif was living again in the person of his disciples, in the diffusion of his doctrines, in the new spirit that was stirring in the nations. Thus it was that the brave

Bohemians were doomed to die. But the martyrdom of Huss and of Jerome roused the national enthusiasm for liberty in the breasts of their countrymen.

The narrative of the Hussite war is one of the most painful and yet one of the most instructive recorded in the pages of history. Under the gallant Ziska and the skilful Procopius, the brave Bohemians held their ground against the forces of the Empire and of Rome. Inspired by a religious enthusiasm which successive victories fanned into a burning flame, they defended their convictions and maintained their liberty in defying the bigot and the oppressor. It was only when divisions sprang up amongst themselves that they ceased to be invincible. Before the Council of Basle they appeared by their representatives, not to implore pity and forbearance, but to consider terms of peace.

The following are the four articles upon which the Bohemian delegates to the Council of Basle were directed to take their stand:—(1) The free preaching of the Word of God. (2) The right of the laity to the cup in the Lord's Supper, and the use of the language of the people in the offices of Christian worship. (3) The exclusion of the clergy from secular offices, especially from positions of civil authority. (4) The subjection of the clergy to the ordinary tribunals of the State.

The traces of Wiclif's influence are manifest in all these articles. They do not insist, as the English disciples of Wiclif would in a similar position have insisted, upon doctrinal protest and purification. In this respect, in dealing rather with external relations than with intellectual propositions, they bore signs of the influence of Huss and Jerome rather than of our great logical divine.

For the time a compromise was effected, which left the Bohemians in enjoyment of what they most prized

and desired. But when the rigid Taborites were vanquished by the more numerous and laxer party, the Calixtines, it seemed as if the whole movement originating in the stirring and powerful writings of Wiclif came to an end. Yet the influence did in some measure survive, partly in the sect of the United Brethren, or Moravians, and partly in the more enlightened and Scriptural character which continued in some slight measure to distinguish Bohemian Christianity.



CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

HAVING told the story of Wiclif's life, and exhibited some of the results of Wiclif's work, it remains to put to ourselves the question:—What estimate must be formed of this great Englishman, this eminent scholar, this high-minded Christian, this bold reformer? What were the qualities by which he was mainly distinguished? How does he compare with other great names in history? What niche is his in the grand and ever-growing Temple of Fame?

The *moral character and disposition* of Wiclif are admittedly deserving of reverential admiration. It is sufficient evidence of his honourable, pure, and unselfish life, to say that no detractor has ever questioned his personal morality. When it is remembered that no crimes were too vile to be attributed by Roman Catholic slanderers to Luther and Calvin, it is conclusive as to the blamelessness of Wiclif's life that calumny has not assailed it. As a heresiarch he has been denounced with the usual acrimony. But in an

age when simony, avarice, sloth, and licentiousness were common vices among the clergy, with not one of them was Wiclif ever charged. By far the greatest scholar, divine, and statesman in the English Church, he enjoyed only the most modest preferment, and never held two benefices at once. In this respect his conduct was in striking contrast to that of his contemporary, William of Wykeham, who, though an able and enlightened man, was a scandalous pluralist. Although a favourite at Court during the middle part of his public life, and for years a trusted ally of the Duke of Lancaster, he never flattered or fawned upon the great. Indeed, it is evident that he steered an independent course between subserviency to the great and flattery of the multitude; for some have charged him with being too much of a courtier, whilst others have represented him as responsible for the turbulence and rebellion of the peasants and artisans in the reign of Richard II.

It has been alleged that Wiclif's

whole course as a reformer was attributable to disappointment and spite; that because he was removed from the wardenship of Canterbury Hall, and because he was not promoted to a bishopric, he was embittered against the ecclesiastical powers, and never ceased maliciously to attack them. But of this there is no shadow of proof; and the man who can read any considerable part of Wiclif's writings, and then assign personal malice as the motive of his assaults upon established errors and abuses, must be utterly destitute of all critical discrimination and judgment. That he might, had he been self-seeking or ambitious, have attained the very highest positions in the Church, is indisputable. It was neither place nor profit that Wiclif sought; his one desire was to promote the progress and prevalence of religious truth and of Christian purity in the nation to which he belonged, and which he warmly loved.

It is true that our first English Reformer has never been the object of that national affection and sympathy which have been offered by the Germans to their great religious hero, Martin Luther. It is not to be denied that Wiclif commands our admiration rather than elicits our sympathy and love. We bow before his blameless and noble character, but we are not charmed by his personality. Partly

owing to the remote period at which he lived, partly owing to his stately isolation, we feel that we do not come near his heart, even when we read his masterly works dealing in some cases with topics of deep and permanent interest. There is but one anecdote recorded of him, and that has a quaint grandeur rather than a human interest. How different is the case with Luther! We seem to know him and to love him; for he had human weaknesses and human tenderness, and his family life called out what is gentlest and sweetest in man's nature. But with Wiclif men seem to have had little fellowship except in common work. His intellect was at least as great, his character as noble, his life-work perhaps as influential, as the German's. Yet as a man he is not so dear, because he is not so real to us, and because he does not seek our sympathy.

Integrity, love of truth, and fearlessness, were all prominent characteristics of Wiclif's character, and were combined in such harmony and in a degree so unusual, as to raise our Reformer to a height of moral majesty unsurpassed in the history of mankind.

In Wiclif's mind we recognize a singular combination of *intellectual ability* with *practical efficiency*. His education was that of the schoolman, the dialectician. Not only his philosophical, but his theological writings,

are the workmanship of a subtle, logical, and vigorous intellect. In controversy no one was a match for him. But at the same time that he was a giant in reasoning, his greatness was equally apparent in his attempts to deal with the realities of political and ecclesiastical life. Questions of finance, of law, of Church policy, were submitted to him with the assurance that he could deal with them more capably and conclusively than any one beside. No doubt he was un pitying in his application of principle, and trenchant in the remedies he advocated. Still, there was practical wisdom in his decisions and in his proposals, and he enjoyed the confidence of more men than might have been expected in the policy he supported alike in Church and in State.

Mental *industry* was never more strikingly exemplified than in the life of Wiclif. During the years in which he was laying the foundation of his greatness, he must have been a most diligent student. His writings show a remarkable familiarity with the works of the "fathers" and of the "schoolmen," and an even more remarkable familiarity with the Holy Scriptures, which only long years of application and study can possibly account for.

But when we consider the activity of Wiclif's later years, we are filled with amazement.

Wiclif's great work was done during the last few years of his life. Had he died before 1374, he would have been known as a university scholar; had his career come to an end four years later, he would have left behind him the reputation of a patriot and of a leading opponent of Papal encroachments upon national rights. The last six years of Wiclif's career, *i.e.* from 1378 to 1384, were the years in which the fruit of all his earlier life was yielded. It was in that period that, having reached his mature convictions, he made his intellectual and spiritual mark upon his country and upon his age. It was in that brief space of time that he did the work of a reformer, both in protesting against the errors of Rome and in enkindling the flame of spiritual liberty.

During these last few years Wiclif wrote the bulk of his Tracts and Treatises, including all his writings against Transubstantiation. The very frequent references to contemporary events are a conclusive proof of the very late period of his life in which a vast number of these productions appeared. During the same years the translation of the Scriptures into English was also both begun and completed. The *Triologus*—a great treatise on Systematic Theology, filling an octavo volume—was also written not before 1381, as is evident from political allusions occurring in the work, and

from its arguments against Transubstantiation.

The labours of the last three or four years of Wiclif's life were prodigious; that he died of paralysis, and before old age, was only the natural consequence of his exciting and unremitting toil.

It is no argument against Wiclif's greatness, or even against the true success of his lifework, that, although a Reformer, he did not effect a Reformation. No doubt there is a measure of justice in the criticism of Milton expressed in the grand and confident language of the *Areopagitica*:—"Had it not been the obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the divine and admirable spirit of Wiclif to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemian Huss nor Jerome, no, nor the name of Luther or of Calvin, had been ever known; the glory of reforming all our neighbours had been completely ours."

But a truer account of the seeming failure of Wiclif's endeavours is to be given by the admission that, in the fourteenth century, the time had not come; for the conditions of a true reformation were yet wanting. The iniquities of Rome were not yet complete. The Councils of Constance and of Basle had not yet assembled. The revival of learning and of literature

had not yet set in. The art of printing was not yet invented. With the sixteenth century came the conditions requisite for a European revolt from Rome. But the men who led that revolt were not, all things considered, greater men than John Wiclif. He was as great in the fourteenth century as were Luther, Zwingle, and Calvin, in the sixteenth. And it is altogether beyond dispute that in England none of the Reformers whose names we hold in honour can for a moment be compared with Wiclif. Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer were men of a distinctly lower grade all of them in natural ability and in theological learning, some also in the realm of practical achievement. In literature not one of them has a claim to a place near that occupied by the translator of the Bible into English. And Tyndal, whose services in this connection are only inferior to Wiclif's, good as was his work, and heroic as were his life and death, was not the figure in English history that his illustrious predecessor had admittedly been.

In conclusion, let the reader consider the witness borne to Wiclif by two of those few distinguished scholars now living, who have done very much to place our Reformer in his true light before the public mind. Let him hear a voice from Oxford and a voice from Dresden.

Professor Montagu Burrows, speaking from the university which has done much to counteract the influence of the Reformer who was among her greatest *alumni*, has justly and generously said :—

“To Wiclif we owe, more than to any one person who can be mentioned, our English language, our English Bible, and our Reformed religion. How easily the words slip from the tongue! But is not this almost the very atmosphere we breathe? Expand that threefold claim a little further. It means nothing less than this,—that in Wiclif we have the acknowledged father of English prose, the first translator of the whole Bible into the language of the English people, the first disseminator of that Bible among all classes, the foremost intellect of his times brought to bear upon the religious questions of the day, the patient and courageous writer of innumerable tracts and books, not for one, but for all the different classes of society, the sagacious originator of that whole system of ecclesiastical reformation which in its separate parts had been faintly shadowed forth by a genius here and there, but which acquired consistency in the hands of the master.”

Dr. Rudolf Buddensieg, the learned and painstaking editor of Wiclif's polemical works in Latin, thus sums

up his judgment of the Reformer and his work :—

“Uniting warm religious feeling with the keen intellect of the dialectician and politician, Wiclif maintained the authority of Holy Scripture over Pope and Church, and from this standpoint went on to criticise the constitution and doctrines of the papal system . . . Even though his remedies for the evils of the times were not always the right ones, his words sometimes ambiguous and apt to be misunderstood, for the earnest minds of a later time they became the fountain of a new spiritual life. Thus his powerful personality, in which the light of a later era seems to be reflected, stands at a turning-point in the history of the Christian Church.

“The first harbingers of a new intellectual, though certainly premature spring, neither timidly nor faintly appear in him fully developed. Neither before nor after him, with the exception of Luther, has any reformer striven with such determination to bring back the Church from her outward, lifeless forms, to urge her regeneration in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture, and to infuse its spirit into her heart. The hidden germ of true religion had to be freed from the manifold external ceremonies by which it was concealed, in order that the Gospel might again

appear in its unveiled purity, and be proclaimed anew to the whole world. And since this national as well as religious revival found its representative in Wiclif, in whom the essential

ideas and endeavours of the pre-reformers in the Church found unre-served expression, he is rightly looked upon as the most distinguished of the early reformers."



