

JOHN WYCLIFFE:

A QUINCENTENARY TRIBUTE.

BY

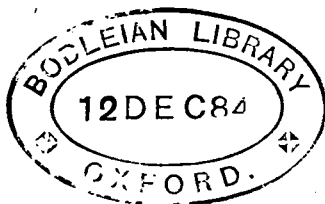
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"LIGHT FROM THE OLD LAMP," "A NOBLE VINE," "NESTLETON MAGNA,"

"MATTHEW MELLOWDEW," "HONEST JOHN STALLIBRASS,"

"GARTON ROWLEY," ETC. ETC. ETC.



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DEDICATION.

“John Wycliffe turned aside from king and noble, from pope and prelate, from priest and scholar, resolved to place the light of Divine Truth, freed from all veil and covering, in the honest keeping of the Common People.”

The great principles for which Wycliffe fought so bravely, toiled so diligently, and suffered so severely, are the Common People's most precious heritage to-day.

TO
THE COMMON PEOPLE,
THEREFORE,
I Dedicate
THIS BRIEF LIFE-STORY
OF
THE NOBLE PIONEER CHAMPION OF THEIR LIBERTIES,
THE MORNING STAR THAT HERALDED THEIR LIGHT.
J. JACKSON WRAY.

LONDON, *May 21, 1884.*

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JOHN WYCLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

PREPARATORY.

ENGLAND is rich in household names. Her historic record is a casket which gleams with many gems. Among these the names of the people's helpers shine with the fairest lustre, and merit the most grateful and careful note. These are they whose powers were not employed in aiding the ambitions of princes, in advancing the interests of a priesthood, or in the attainment of any merely selfish ends. The men who devoted their lives and consecrated their powers to the task of promoting the highest interests of the people, the moral enlightenment and social uplifting of the masses, —these are the men, and this is the work

A

which should ever command the fairest and most enduring fame.

Very beautiful upon the mountains were the feet of those who brought glad tidings to this bound and burdened nation in the old, dark days of long ago; beautiful in the eyes of the weary souls who had long been waiting for their coming; beautiful in our eyes as we read their hero history, and rejoice in the clear noon-light of the day they largely made to dawn. Beautiful their names are, fragrant their memories are—names and memories which surely Protestant England will never permit to die.

Among the many noteworthy and foremost figures of the fourteenth century—the powerful kings, victorious princes, martial barons, chivalrous knights, and proud ecclesiastics, who mingle in glittering profusion on that exciting and splendid stage,—one commanding form stands high above the crowd, head and shoulders taller than his compeers; the man of his age; one of the rare few who are the men of all ages—John Wycliffe, the “Gospel Doctor,” the Morning Star of the Reformation.

This bold pioneer of religious liberty looms out from these medieval mists, amid which his lot was cast, in rugged grandeur. Like some solitary mountain seen through the fogs of early morning, half free from the coils of chill grey vapour which gather round its base, and with the fair tinge of day-break brightening its hoary brow, so the form of John Wycliffe looms through the shadows of five hundred years. This solitary and lonely man bears himself so nobly, shows so bold a front, stands so thoroughly foursquare to all the winds that blow, manifests such unshaken steadfastness of purpose, displays such energy in action, such fidelity to principle, and withal performs so grand a work for England and for truth, that the spectacle is almost as unique as it is certainly sublime.

Before the far-off days of Wycliffe there were many, very many, in England and elsewhere, who sighed and sorrowed over the thick darkness that covered the land—many, very many, who chafed under and rebelled against the spiritual despotism which held the land in bondage, and who longed, heart-sick and despair-

ing, for the dawn of a brighter day. In convent cells, in moated castles, in city tenements, and in rural homesteads there were those, despite the darkness, who had obtained some knowledge of the truth of God, some notion of the light and liberty which should follow in its train. There were men and women, too, who were more progressive than their times, whose lives were better and nobler than those of their spiritual guides, and whose faith was far in advance of the hazy creed they scarcely professed to teach.

It was also true that now and then there had arisen some bold teacher in the ranks of the priesthood, who having sought the truth and found it, loved it for its own sake, and dared to proclaim it to all within their reach. Foremost among these must be placed the learned and pious Robert Grosstête, Bishop of Lincoln, who not only lived and loved and taught the gospel, but boldly and successfully withstood the Pope, who sought to give his own young grandson a canonry in the Lincoln Cathedral. In equal if not superior rank as a pre-reformer, Thomas Bradwardine must have

an honoured place. As mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and theologian, this "Profound Doctor," as he was called, shed forth a light both clear and full, and there is little doubt that Wycliffe himself was indebted to and influenced by his evangelic lectures more than it is now possible to trace.

Nevertheless, there was sorely wanted some great and daring soul, who should become the unflinching spokesman of the faithful few; some heroic spirit, so far in sympathy with their longings for liberty and light, for deliverance from the grinding yoke of Rome, as to give frank and fearless voice to their desire, and if needs be, to carry the war into the enemy's camp itself. What was wanted was a man of the Elijah and John the Baptist type, who should boldly confront the more than royal Ahabs and mitred Herods who were the troublers of Israel, and demand liberty of conscience, an open Bible, and freedom from the priesthood's galling yoke.

Then arose John Wycliffe, full of learning, full of zeal, splendidly endowed with moral courage. He spake out the great thoughts

with which he was inspired in bold, vivid, vigorous Anglo-Saxon speech; never shrinking from the strife, never swerving before the tumultuous wrath which he aroused. He showed up the superstitions and impositions of the priesthood and the religious orders; and all the while declared to the people, with lips touched with a divine "coal from off the altar," the simple, saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hated and feared by lordly prelate, mitred abbot, licentious priests, luxurious monks, lascivious friars, his clear ringing voice startled them out of their cushioned sloth and soft security, and made each jewelled staff and crozier to tremble in the hands that held them. He was the first Englishman, the first man of any nation, to protest boldly, openly, constantly, and successfully against the Papal domination. He headed the great insurrection of free conscience against priestly power. He struck the first blow in that long and well-fought battle which brake the bonds of Britain and freed her from the yoke of Rome!

Five hundred years have run their course

since this great Englishman passed from the field of conflict to his promotion and reward. From that day to this the wholesome and potent leaven has been working and expanding at the nation's heart. To-day the Book he first opened for us is the secret of England's greatness, the talisman of her power, the tenure of her existence, the core of her laws, the hope of her people, the voice of her God!

Surely nothing can be more fitting at this quincennial anniversary of his death, than to recount, in gratitude to God, and in honour of his noble memory, the brave deeds John Wycliffe did in the great battlefield on which our liberties were won.

“To side with truth is noble when we share her wretched
crust,
Ere her cause brings fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to
be just ;
Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands
aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they once
denied.

Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes—that were souls that
stood alone,
While the men they agonised for, hurled the contumelious
stone,

Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam
incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith
divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and by God's
supreme design."

CHAPTER II.

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

IN order that we may fully understand the great work done by Wycliffe as an evangelical pioneer, and obtain a clear idea of the tremendous cost at which he did it, it will be necessary, first of all, to sketch the condition of State, Church, and People in England when this Boanerges rolled his thunders through the dark, and flashed across our gloomy hemisphere the expulsive light of truth. It would be impossible to do justice to the man if we did not realise his surroundings, at least partially, and try to reproduce, in connection with the study of him, the times in which he lived.

In the fourteenth century there were three forces in England vigorously contending for the mastery—the Crown, the Barons, and the

Papacy. The king was vainly striving to stretch the royal prerogative to despotism; the barons sought to strengthen their feudal influence, and to obtain a larger share of the governing power; the best endeavours of the Papacy were directed towards the absolute reduction of the country into vassalage to the Pope, a mere appanage of the see of Rome. The English people were regarded by each party as clay in the hands of the potter; the point of quarrel was into whose hands the clay should fall.

In these great and long-continued struggles for supreme power, Rome was, as usual, by far the shrewdest politician of the three. She was for ever on the watch for opportunities, and promptly seized them when they came. Siding now with the king, at another time with the barons, and at a third boldly taking independent ground, she turned each party to advantage, became a recognised umpire to whom appeal was necessary, and so enlarged her own influence at the expense of both. Whether the feast was served up in shallow dishes or in long-necked jars, she could be

either fox or crane as occasion served, and could feed with equal ease at either board.

The English throne at the time of which I now speak was occupied by Edward III., and by his side towered his stalwart sons, Edward the Black Prince, and John the Duke of Ghent, or John of Gaunt as he was more popularly called. It was a time of war and battle. Scotland and France were pertinacious foes, and though Bannockburn established the liberties of Scotland, Crecy and Poitiers added largely to the power and prestige of the king.

It was what is called the age of chivalry. Fed by the Crusades, the last of which was possibly still remembered by living men, a devotion to military glory, oddly enough admixed with a devotion to the Cross as the standard of the Faith, was greatly prevalent, and deeds of knightly prowess and of warlike show were highly popular. Feats of skill in the use of the weapons of the day, and imposing tournaments, "all splendid to behold," were among the favourite amusements of the ruling classes. It was a form of militancy to

which the discovery and the use of gunpowder was a final death-blow ; but it was a foremost feature of those medieval times.

At the tournaments or joustings which were constantly being held at the great castles of the nobles, there was ever a brilliant display. There were the heralds, clad in coats of many colours, who with flourish of trumpets proclaimed the coming tourney. Knights in burnished mail and plumed helmets, and bestriding mailed and prancing steeds, entered the lists, "lance in rest and visor down," each bent on unhorsing his opponent, that he might carry off from some fair hand the prize of victory. The surrounding gallery held a bright array of rank and beauty as spectators of the fray. The castle hall, adorned with flags and banners and gilded heraldry, received the gorgeous company when the fight was over, that they might eat the beeves of England and drink the wines of France ; while waiting minstrels tuned their harps the while their masters feasted, and sang of knightly deeds of derring-do and the reward of some fair lady's love. All this, as may be well imagined, had

small advantage in it, but the fruit of it was much exaction of the people, for, as usual in these matters, "the Greeks had to pay the piper."

This was also what is called the feudal age. The territory of England was sliced out into huge tracts and parcels, which, together with the serfs or villeins who dwelt thereon, were held in fief by the barons, and much of them out of fief by the Church and the religious orders: The barons possessed their estates subject to military service of men and material to the king. They were little other than kinglets on their own account, and in some cases were even more powerful than the king. The land was dotted over with huge castles, fortified by moat and wall and bulwark, into which was drained all the wealth of the barony, to swell the pomp and power of its lordly chief. Large numbers of retainers, armed with hanger, lance, or crossbow, used to alternate between boozing on strong beer and making raids upon the Saxon hinds; or, at the beck of their chieftain, engaging in rough warfare with a rival baron on some question of border

rights. The boors, serfs, or villeins who tilled the soil were little better than slaves at the mercy of their lords, and were transferred, like chattels, with the land on which they were born and bred. The lot of the "common people" in general was in those days pitiful indeed.

It was an age of transition, too, that in which John Wycliffe lived. The various tribes and races—Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane, and Norman—who had found a home in England, were losing their distinctive peculiarities. Jealousies, hatreds, prejudices of a tribal kind, were beginning to die out. Interminglings and intermarriages were becoming more and more the order of the day. These racial tributaries were beginning to flow together into one common channel, forming that strong English stream of humanity, which, if it carries ever the Word of God upon its flood, is likely to flow round the world and through the centuries until the millennium appears.

As a result of this fusion, the languages and dialects of the time were being mixed and mingled. Of course in certain places Norman-

French was spoken, in others plain Saxon, and in others the original Celtic tongue was heard ; but more and more the Saxon predominated, blended with the speech of every tribe which had found a home within our borders. It was crude and rough, but it was strong and vigorous. It is John Wycliffe's crowning honour that he shaped it so as to put the Word of God within it, and left that precious legacy to the English race.

It was also an age of definite mental progress. Roger Bacon, the learned friar, had cast many a gleam of light upon it. "Piers Ploughman" rudely but tersely uttered high thoughts in convincing words ; Froissart, that most gossipy of chroniclers, wrote the record of his times ; Robert Gower tuned a clear poetic harp ; grand old Geoffrey Chaucer told his tales and sang his lays, and, as much as the crude language of the times could express for men, he made it do ; Bishop Grosstête, Duns Scotus, Thomas Bradwardine, William of Occam, John Wycliffe, and other theologic lights, fit successors of the Venerable Bede, sought to rescue truth from the death-clasp

of superstition, and compelled the darkness to give way to dawn. Besides all this, the foundations of the British Constitution were being well and truly laid; parliament was becoming a power, never to be left out of the reckoning, when any great question was afoot; and the "knights of the shire," as representatives of the mind of the people, were becoming possessed of a vigorous power to say to kings, princes, and popes, a very influential "Yea" and "Nay."

It is surely a very noteworthy and suggestive fact this, that at the same time the first reformer, John Wycliffe, gave this land its Bible, and so laid the lasting foundation of a free and living Christianity, Geoffrey Chaucer should lay the broad foundations of an English literature, and the statesmen of the time should firmly fix the corner-stone of representative government, and foster the free expression and enforcement of the popular will. Surely we may learn herefrom this great and golden lesson, that enlightenment and freedom are the inseparable and beautiful handmaids of religion; that wherever the tree of life

extends its vital and sacred branches, the tree of knowledge and the tree of liberty will as certainly grow hard by, and flourish in enduring strength and grandeur in the same consecrated soil !

“ Ah ! well may tyrants fear the truth
That sets the spirit free ;
For in truth's train fair knowledge comes,
And glorious liberty !

Truth lights her beacon-fires, and lo,
So quenchless is the flame
The spirit it hath called to life
Nor rack nor stake could tame.

That chainless power, the Book divine,
True freedom gives and guards ;
And opens wide the gates of mind
For learning's rich rewards.

Hail to the men, Great England's boast,
Who in that darker age
Gave her the truth that makes her free,
And lights her lettered page !”

CHAPTER III.

THE SECULAR CLERGY.

FIVE hundred years ago the proud usurpations and grinding impositions of the Papal Church in England had reached their greatest height, and its moral abominations and social impurities had reached a proportionate depth. This amazing system of spiritual tyranny had laid its mighty grasp on both law and government, and shaped them both to serve its own purposes. The Papal legate, striding ruthless over all enactments, was able to make even the ministers of justice to tremble at his tribunal. He overawed parliaments, and compelled kings to yield compliance to his decrees. The one bold aim of the prelacy was nothing less than the entire monopoly of all ecclesiastical and of all secular rule, and in this they had achieved an almost total measure of success.

Popery had an ecclesiastical army of agents in this country, vast in numbers, rich in wealth, thoroughly organised, and almost omnipotent in power. In giving the reader a rapid glance at this tremendous array, numbering nearly thirty thousand in a total population of less than three millions, the first place must be accorded to the secular clergy. These included all the ranks of the priesthood, from the archbishops and bishops at the head, down to the humblest curate of a country parish. The bishoprics were sustained by immense landed estates, to which were attached important civil powers as well as high ecclesiastical authority. The lower clergy, residing principally among their people, were supported mainly by tithes levied on their respective parishes, and the all too liberal interpretation of their claims was the cause of chronic heartburn and dissatisfaction among their parishioners.

The corruption of this body of clerics had become a proverb and by-word, not only in England, but through all Christendom; and it is not too much to say that "frightful profligacy" is not too strong a term to use in

describing them as they were in John Wycliffe's day. Of course it can be well understood that there were in so large a number many pleasing and praiseworthy exceptions to the rule. In many of the poorer parishes, and occasionally among the higher clerics, there were those who were men of another spirit, who were "among the faithless, faithful found." But these were comparatively a feeble few; the bulk of them were a scandal to the Church and a curse to the community. This sad state of things may be largely traceable to three causes.

First, their freedom as citizens, together with all the religious orders, from all interference on the part of the civil authority. It seems to be almost too much for credence, but it is perfectly true, that however a clergyman might break the laws of the land, of whatever offence he might be guilty, he could not be tried in any ordinary court of justice in England. The Church demanded and obtained the right to try all such offenders in its own courts, according to its own laws, and by its own judges. The only possible appeal was

to the Pope of Rome. But that Church has ever been in the habit of treating the members of its guild mildly, and to all offenders who were clad in the garb of the Papal brotherhood her "justice" was marvellously tempered, and to them, so long as they did not offend against *herself*, her tender mercies were the opposite of cruel.

In the reign of Henry II. it was publicly stated by the judges, and in his Majesty's presence, that during the first ten years of his reign more than a hundred murders had been committed by clergymen, in addition to numberless thefts, robberies, assaults, and other crimes, for which the law had no power to punish them. Almost every English king in succession tried to put an end to this dangerous clerical immunity; but the Pope was too strong for them; the absolutism of the Papacy must be maintained, at whatever cost to right and justice. In the reign of Edward II., when a determined effort was made to rid the nation of this scandal, the Pope threatened to excommunicate both king and kingdom. In the same bull his Holiness says, with an

audacity which in these days appears to be perfectly astounding, that "the idea is horrifying, that the clergy invested with the sacerdotal character, and shining with the splendour of pontifical dignity, should be tried by laymen, condemned and hanged, when found guilty of robbery or murder, to the great provocation of the Supreme King, who hath forbidden the secular power to touch His anointed." This was the "benefit of clergy" with a vengeance, and this immunity from the civil jurisdiction was the cause of much, very much of the clerical immorality which was the scandal of the Church five hundred years ago.

Another cause was, doubtless, the enforced celibacy of the clergy. Perhaps there was no question on which the Pope's commands were longer or more firmly resisted among the English priesthood than this. It seemed then, as it is now, altogether opposite to the instincts and home-loving tastes peculiar to the English race. But, willy-nilly, they were compelled to submit. In order to bind the priesthood firmly to a central power, the power of

the Pope, all the ties of family and country must be loosened and destroyed. In 1102, an ecclesiastical council was held in London, and a canon law was passed compelling all priests of every station to put away their wives, never to see them or speak to them. Those unhallowed wretches who refused were instantly to be deposed and excommunicated, and all their goods were to be forfeited to the bishops, while their wives were to be subjected to the law against adulteresses. It only needs to be said that the rigour with which the law of celibacy was administered, taking into consideration the practice of auricular confession, and the peculiar relationship of the clergy to their parishioners, is chargeable with having brought about an utter and irreclaimable profligacy amongst the clerics of John Wycliffe's days.

A quotation from Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" will afford some idea of a large class of priests, such as he, a contemporary of the great Reformer, was accustomed to see—

"Now there was of that church a parish clerk,
The whiche was icleped Absalom;
Curl was his hair, and as gold it shone,

And strutted as a fan right large and broad :
 Full straight and even lay his jolie hood ;
 His face was red, his eyes grey as goose.
 With Paul's windows carven on his shoes,
 In hosen red he went full fetously ;
 With tunic gay, full tight and properly.
 And thereupon he had a white surplice,
 As white as is the blossom of the rose ;—
 A merry child he was so God me save,
 Well could he let blood, or clip, or shave,
 And make a charter of land or acquittance.
 In twenty manners he could skip and dance ;
 As well could he play on a giterne.
 In all the town was no brewhouse or tavern
 But he did visit it with his solace. . . .
 As drunk as any jolly tapster was.
 This Absalom that jolly was and gay
 Goeth with the censer on each holy day,
 Sensing the wyves of the parish fast,
 And many a lovely look he on them cast."

A third sure method of accounting for the low moral condition of the secular clergy in Wycliffe's time, is to consider the abuses inseparably connected with the sale of clerical offices. Here, again, the Pontiff claimed full control. The Pope was in reality a sort of farmer-general of Church property. Whosoever could pay the highest price for preferment was all but certain to get it, whether the coveted prize was an archbishopric or a country living. Then, again, those who so bought it

were at liberty to farm it out again, and the process might be continued almost as long as any percentage on investment was possible. All this rack-renting in the interests of the Papal chests, and of subholders who copied that high example, developed a spirit of covetousness and avarice, which led to severe exactions and harsh oppression, as well as to all the evils of a merely nominal and non-resident authority. If poor priests, however good and zealous and conscientious, could not pay the required bribes, they were excluded from the exercise of their sacred office; while those who had money wherewith to "hire a benefice," were sure of a "living," though their own manner of living might be ever so scandalous and abominable. The richest prizes of the English Church fell to Italians, the Pope's favourites, some of whom, though unable to speak one word of English, and who had never set foot on English soil, held thirty and even forty valuable benefices, letting them out on hire on terms which secured for themselves the lion's share of the revenues attached thereto. Such was the lamentable state of

things among the English clergy when England was the freehold of the Pope! It was impossible that this state of things should continue. Such an offence before high Heaven must, at whatever cost of judgment storm, be swept away.

“ Fear not that the tyrant shall rule for ever,
Or the priests of so dark a faith ;
They stand on the brink of that mighty river,
Whose waves they have tainted with death.
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells ;
Around them it foams, and rages, and swells ;
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks in the surge of eternity.”

CHAPTER IV.

MONKS AND MONASTERIES.

BESIDES the numerous ranks of the secular clergy, the Papal army in England was composed of the monks, who for some occult reason were called the regular clergy. These men resided in small communities by themselves, and were under perpetual vows of chastity, poverty, and seclusion. Whatever may be said in favour of this system as to its earlier history, as a means of reviving true religion, promoting the increase of learning, and bettering the condition of the people, it cannot be denied that its virtues dwindled into non-existence, and that it developed vices and produced a crop of mischief, which in the fourteenth century was too gross to be adequately described.

The monks swarmed like bees, or rather drones, for theirs was not a honey-making

industry, but a honey-eating *idlesse*, a life of the utmost luxury and ease. Their wealth was enormous. Lands, tenements, gold and jewels were lavished upon them in return for the spiritual advantages in the way of miracles, masses, indulgences, and other precious wares of Rome in which they were empowered to deal. Some idea of their wealth and state may be gathered from the fact that they often acted as hosts to the king and his royal retinue, and that royal councils and national parliaments were held in the gorgeous piles in which they dwelt.

Nothing in all the land was more grand and imposing than the stately abbey in which they dwelt. Its elaborate Gothic architecture, its princely halls, its gilded, carved, and stencilled interior, its tall towers, its lofty aisles and corridors, its spacious cloisters and numerous dormitories, were indeed a sight to see. Without the abbey itself there were spacious stables and domestic offices, bowling alleys, parks, fish-ponds, gardens, and grottoes, all enclosed within embattled walls and sculptured gates. Outside the walls, the broad abbey-lands,

grain-fields, orchards, well-stocked pastures, and forests swarming with game stretched for miles around the central pile. All these were the property of those humble men who had taken on them the vows of poverty, had left the vanities of this world behind them to lead an ascetic life of self-renouncing virtue! The abbey cooks, butlers, gamekeepers, kitchen, cellars, and refectory, all testified to the abundant care which was lavished on the bodies of these holy anchorites. Their lines, at any rate, had fallen in pleasant places, and their heritage, from one point of view at least, was of the goodliest sort.

Of the moral condition of these monastic establishments, sufficient evidence was given in the days of Henry VIII., when the commissioners appointed by that self-assertive monarch reduced the abbeys to "houses with their fronts off," and revealed the inner abominations to the light of day. As they were then, they had been for some previous centuries, and it must suffice us to say that they were fit ecclesiastical comrades of the secular clergy; their moral portrait made a twin-companion

picture, and the cry that went up to heaven from the secret places of the monks was the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah; a cry, like theirs, that in due time brought down a rain of fire!

These vast establishments, and their clerical inmates, like the secular clergy, rejoiced in absolute freedom of control by the civil power. They were directly and only answerable to the Pope. No Parliament could ever levy a tax in these privileged classes, nor arrest a member of them—not even on a charge of treason to their king and country! Besides this, they had the power to confer the “right of sanctuary” on all fugitives from justice. They opened their sacred doors to laymen who were breakers of the law; and so thieves and felons of all sorts, so protected, could look out from the wing of Mother Church and defy the law of the land and the orders of the king. By the way, lest one should be suspected of exaggeration in depicting the sumptuous life of the monk of the fourteenth century, it may be well to quote again from Chaucer’s pen-pictures, his description of a member of that fraternity:—

“ A monk there was, a fair for masterie,
A rider out that loved venerie ;
A manly man, to be an abbot able,
And many a dainty horse he had in stable.
And when he rode abroad, men might his bridle hear,
Jingling with silver bells, in whistling wind so clear.
I saw his sleeves all purfled at the hand
With fur, and that the finest in the land ;
And for to fasten his hood aneath his chin,
He had, of gold ywrought a curious pin,
A love-knot at the greater end there was.
His head was bald and shone like any glass ;
And eke his face as it had been anoint.
He was a lord full fat and in good point.
His eyes were steep and rolled in his head,
That steamed as a furnace made of lead ;
He also was a sportisman, aright ;
Grey-hounds he had as swift as fowl for flight.
Of prycking, and of hunting for the hare,
Was all his lust, no coste did he spare.
His bootès supple, his horse of fine estate ;
Now, soothely, sirs, he was a grand prelate.
He was not pale, like any for-pined ghost ;
A fat swan loved he best of any roast.”

Surely Dan Chaucer's contemporary witness is clearly to be understood !

Much has been said in favour of the charity of the monks, and their exhibition of the grace of hospitality. Let them have full justice in this as in all other respects, but not more than justice. As to their hospitality, it must be remembered that travellers in those

days were scarce articles, so that it could not often fall in their way to act the good Samaritan; and when they did, in all probability, the novelty and the news brought sufficient acquittance to them in their sequestered locality, even if they did not obtain, as was not unusual, some substantial thank-offering for their timely boon. As for their charity, let them have full advantage of it. It was often liberal to prodigality; yet they were by no means the favourites of the poorer classes, and it may well be doubted whether it was not a means of encouraging mendicancy rather than of really ministering to the honest necessities of the deserving poor.

We are told, again, that the monks were the conservers of literature, the depositaries of such learning as then existed, and that the hermit of the cloister saved the lamp of sacred light from utter extinction. In all this there is at least a modicum of truth. That in past times, at any rate, such was the case must not be denied. But the question naturally arises as to the measure of severe condemnation that should be passed on those who had the light,

and yet who, of set purpose, held it from the people, whose inalienable right it was, and for whose condition of midnight darkness they were specially answerable as the appointed trustees of so great a charge. Both priest and monk were equally guilty here. No word of the public services of religion was permitted to be given in the only tongue the people could understand. Many of the parish priests themselves could only mumble over the formal sentences in the Missal and the Breviary, as though they were uttering the abracadabra of an incantation. The monk in his cloister had, with rare exceptions, sunk into the same condition of mental night. He had lost the skill to read the parchment treasures of past ages which lay hid away in the old convent chests. And not only so, he would positively sponge out the ancient writings from priceless manuscripts, and write a nonsensical legendary lie concerning an imaginary saint on the parchment ruined by his Vandal hands. Such was the monastery and its inmates five hundred years ago.

“ Here superstition holds her dreary reign,
And her lip-laboured orisons she plies,
In tongue unknown, when morn bedews the plain,
Or evening skirts with gold the western skies.
To the dumb stone she bends, or sculptured wall,
And many a cross she makes and many a bead lets fall.

With shaven crown in a sequestered cell,
In thriftless vice a lazy laggard lay ;
No work had he save some few beads to tell,
And indolently snore the hours away.
No patriot voice awaits his languid eye ;
No calls of honour raise his drowy head ;
Impure, he spurns chaste Hymen’s holy tie,
But is to arts licentious darkly wed.
No social hopes hath he, no social fears,
But spends in wassail lewd the passing years.”

CHAPTER V.

THE MENDICANT FRIARS.

BESIDE the priests and monks, who exercised so large a share of power and divided among them so much ecclesiastical spoil, must be placed the various Orders of Mendicant Friars. These had so increased in John Wycliffe's time that they were found in greater numbers than their cloistered rivals. They had made their appearance in England so late as the early part of the thirteenth century, but they were now by far the most efficient corps of the papal army in this kingdom. These itinerant clerics were found everywhere, in every lane and byway. With closely shaven crowns, unshod feet, coarse frieze gown and girdle of hempen rope, they roamed over the land at will, and led a life of vagabondage of which we can form but a faint idea.

There can be no question that the original motive which led to the establishment of this religious order was a thoroughly good and worthy one; and there can be as little question that for some length of time their history has a fair record to show, and proves them worthy of the esteem in which they were held. Their early course was marked by poverty, humility, and active benevolence; they spread themselves as self-denying evangelists among the people, and carried into operation the pious designs of their great founder. But as in the case of monachism, this new revival soon displayed the inherent vices that must for ever and everywhere attend any system that arrogates to itself divine functions, and is responsible to no secular authority or control whatever in the country in which they dwell.

Sick and weary of the merciless rapacity, the domineering pride, the shameful licentiousness of the priests and monks, the English people welcomed the incoming of the friars as the true servants of God and the real friends of the poor. The most thoughtful men of the time, who sighed and sorrowed

over the sad condition of things which prevailed in the Church, were led to hope, from the advent of these mendicant priests, for the dawn of a genuine reformation. But, alas! it was soon evident that they had only exchanged the locust for the cankerworm, or rather, that they had now gotten a combination of both, with an abundance of caterpillars to keep them company. The plagues of Egypt were rivalled by these men, and like the frogs that came upon the land of Pharaoh, they were found in all places, alike in the king's bedchamber and the kneading-troughs of the poor, so that the land stank with them, and the last state was worse than the first.

The sad and pitiful ignorance of all things spiritual on the part of the people helped to foster the friar's influence. When the bare-footed Mendicant, clad in his serge gown and weary with travel, stood upon some village green and announced to the credulous villagers that he had come to offer pardons, indulgences, redemption of souls from purgatory, and all the precious wares of the Church at prices so low as to reach the purses of the poorest, his

cheerful and heartily-given message was welcomed as the glad tidings of great joy. It was at any rate a more appropriate gospel, so far as their social condition went, than any they had to hope for from priest or monk.

And then, too, his wallet was rich in precious and holy relics, the bones of saints, or strips from their garments, and even morsels of mass-bread of the Pope's own blessing. With these he could work notable miracles of relief, alike to sick bodies, barren farms, and unfruitful flocks. Moreover, he was kindly, cheerful, affable, and condescending. He would freely sit down under the thatched roof of the lowliest cottage; would eat with his rustic hosts, washing down the plain fare with huge draughts from the pewter tankard, while his merry jests and laughter-moving stories were capital sauce to the humble fare. It is quite impossible to depict on any printed page the excesses that all this produced, and the malarious influence exerted on the domestic life of the people by these insinuating agents of social impurity, whose office gave them such a hold upon the people's

hopes and fears. In Sir Walter Scott's story of *Ivanhoe*, the song of Friar Tuck gives a sufficiently broad picture of the man and his manners; the darker shades are perforce left out:—

“The friar walks out, and where'er he has gone,
The land and its fatness are marked for his own;
He can roam where he lists, he can sleep when he tires,
For every man's house is the Barefooted Friar's.

He's expected at noon, and no man till he comes
May profane the great chair, or the porridge of plums;
For the best of the fare, and a seat next the fire,
Is the undenied right of the Barefooted Friar.

He's expected at night, and the pasty's made hot;
They broach the brown ale, and they fill the black pot;
And the goodwife would wish her goodman in the mire,
Ere *he* lacked a soft pillow, that Barefooted Friar.

Long flourish the sandal, the cord, and the cope,
The dread of the devil, the trust of the Pope;
For to gather life's roses unscathed by the briar
Is granted alone to the Barefooted Friar.”

As may well be imagined, it was an additional virtue in the friar, in the estimation of a people ground down with Church taxes, that the friar never exacted any tithes. He was by no means slow in condemning the lazy pride, wealth, and extortion of priests and monks, all which, well interlarded with cutting

jests at their expense, was pleasant to hear. As for himself, he demanded nothing ! But if his kind friends saw fit to entertain him, or to put into his wallet some good things for him to carry to his poor comrades, why, the saints would surely reward them in their own basket and store. Moreover, all such kindly donors would have the advantage of his own intercessions with Heaven, for he should duly remember them in his private devotions. If one may judge from Geoffrey Chaucer's sketch of this worthy, that promise did not amount to very much :—

“ When folk at church had given him what they list,
 He went his way, no longer could he rest,
 With scrip and pyked staff y-tucked high,
 In every house he 'gan to pore and pry ;
 And begged meal, or cheese, or else corn.
 His fellow had a staff y-tipped with horn,
 A pair of tables, all of ivory,
 And eke a pointell polished fetously,
 And wrote the names as he stood,
 Of all the folk that gave them any good,
 All for that he might for them pray,
 ‘ Give us a bushel of wheat, or malt, or rye,
 ‘ A God's cake, or a trifle of cheese,
 ‘ Or else what ye list, I may not choose,
 ‘ A God's halfpenny, or a mass-penny,
 ‘ Or give us of your brawn if you have any ;

‘ A dagon of your blanket, dearè dame,—
 ‘ Our sister dearè, lo, here I write your name,—
 ‘ Bacon or beef, or such thing as ye find.’
 A sturdy hireling aye went hard behind,
 That was their host’s man, and bare a sack,
 And what men gave him laid it on his back.
 But when this friar was out of door, anon,
He plained away the namès, every one,
 That he before had written on his tables ;
 He servèd them with niffles and with fables.”

So they ranged from parish to parish under the special sanction of the Pope, underselling their clerical rivals and crowding them out of the spiritual market. They rapidly increased in number, wandered about the land by thousands ; dropping into the houses of the people at all hours, singing, preaching, story-telling, news-bearing, christening, marrying, and meddling at their own sweet will. With begging-bag on the one side, pardon-bag on the other side, relics from Rome in their pockets, which, says Chaucer with inimitable sarcasm, they had brought from the Pope *all hot*, and with pedlars’ trinkets for the women hid in their hoods, they wandered to and fro, for “their home was everywhere.”

One might fill many pages with Chaucer’s

keenly realistic descriptions of the friar and his ways, but one more must suffice :—

“ His wallet lay before him on his lap,
Brimful of pardons brought from Rome all hot.
A voice he had as small as any goat,
In 's wallet was a strip of the Virgin's veil.
He said he had a gobbet of the sayl
That St. Peter had when that he went
Upon the sea till Jesus Christ him hent.
He had a crosse of tinnè, full of stones,
And in a glass he haddè piggè's bones;
But with these relics, when that he fand
A poor parson dwelling upon land,
Upon one day he got him more money
Than that the parson got in monthès three ;
And thus with feigned flattery and japes,
He made the parson and the folk his apes.”

Nor were the attentions of the friars confined to the poor and lowly. They neglected no class of society, and with more or less success made their way among them all. Some of them were men of learning, and they were able at length to wield great influence in the universities themselves. By their holy beggary they became enormously rich. They were not permitted by canon law to be the owners of land, so they invested their funds in magnificent churches and convents, in gold

and silver plate, in rich vestments and precious stones, while the interior of their convents witnessed immoralities not surpassed by the monasteries of their cloistered rivals. It would be difficult to find in the whole history of man a more shameful and humiliating page than that which records the impious and immoral doings of the religious orders five hundred years ago.

“ Round many a convent’s blazing fire
Unhallowed threads of revelry are spun.
There Venus sits, disguisèd like a nun;
While Bacchus, clothed in semblance of a friar,
Pours out his choicest beverage.

.
The arched roof, with resolute abuse
Of its grave echoes, swells a choral cheer,
Whose votive burden is—‘ Our kingdom’s here ! ’ ”

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNIVERSITY.

BAD as matters were in England five hundred years ago so far as the religious orders were concerned, it may well be doubted whether a close inquiry into the condition of the universities at that time would not reveal an almost equally sad and disreputable state of things. Indeed, it is scarcely possible to imagine other than that so foul a stream as that which we have been tracing, subject to whatever tributaries of pollution, could be other than turbid and tainted at the fountainhead. Sufficient information has come down to us to prove beyond all question, that the stream which flowed from the threshold of the halls of learning made the waters of the dead sea of social stagnation in England still more brackish and unwholesome.

There certainly was a stronger heart-beat of national feeling at Oxford than amongst any of the clerical orders, and it is also true that there was a more active jealousy of pontifical influence, and a more vigorous impatience with papal interference. But when we come to inquire for liberal ideas, for sound learning, for real religious feeling and example, for evangelic teaching, and the inculcation of true morals, the search is all but vain.

In those days one of the most promising paths to competency and preferment was the practice of the law, especially the canon law, which, as we have seen, was far the more influential and important of the two. Hence many of the candidates for the priesthood spent the whole of their college term in mastering all the legal subtleties and sophistries to equip themselves with the weapons most likely to win a golden prize. The profession of medicine, too, was popular and profitable, and so that, also, was monopolised by the omnivorous churchmen, who left a comparatively clean platter for the laity. And so it came to pass that the science of medicine as it was

understood, or rather misunderstood, in those days, formed an important part of the college curriculum. There seems to have been three evil things, a sort of trinity of evil genii, according to medical science in the fourteenth century, against which the doctors had to wage perpetual war in the human body. These were "phlegm," "rheum," and "humours," and the university course in this direction was to equip the young medicos of the time with weapons for the expulsion from the bodies of the sick one or other or all of this doughty trio. The mystery of the healing art was just a medley of quackery and superstition, with here and there a modicum of ordinary common-sense. We read of small-pox being so thoroughly cured by wrapping the patient in "red scarlet cloth," that not even a scar was left behind. Epileptic fits were to be stopped by saying mass over the patient, and causing his parents or nearest living relatives to fast! Intimately connected with the behaviour of the humours, rheum, phlegm, and so on, were the controlling influence of the stars, and so astrology, after

the fashion of Zadkiel, his precursors and successors, was an important element of education.

For those who had no taste either for law or medicine, there was that marvellous scholastic philosophy, with all its abstruse and non-sensical discussions about entities and non-entities, substances and accidents, substantial forms and occult qualities. Such marvellous questions as the following vexed the mind and employed the time and talents of the foremost scholars of the age:—What number of angels can stand on a needle's point? Does the glorified body of Christ in heaven stand or sit? Is the body of Christ which is eaten in the mass, dressed or naked? Were the clothes in which Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, real or only apparent? In secular questions, the following proved such a Gordian knot that it could not be even cut:—“Whether a hog, with a rope tied round his neck, which is held at the other end by a man, is really carried by the rope or the man?” That subtle problem was gravely argued by “subtle,” “profound,” “sublime,”

“angelic” doctors and logicians, and was finally declared insoluble, inasmuch as the arguments were of equal cogency, beauty, refinement, and delicacy on both sides! Piti-ful as all this is, there was a lower deep; for their speculations in many cases are directly blasphemous, while their obscenity proves the university doctors to be fit companions for priests, monks, and friars in the sty of moral impurity.

In the preceding century to that in which John Wycliffe lived and laboured, Roger Bacon declared that there were not half-a-dozen scholars who had any knowledge of either Greek or Hebrew. If, for a wonder, any eccentric tutor or professor of those times did make an effort to teach Scripture truth, he was contemptuously called “A Bible doctor,” and had hard work to get a room to lecture in, or to get a handful of young men to listen. Nothing was more difficult than to find a copy of the Divine Book within the walls of the university; and in 1353, four young Irish priests from Dublin, who came to England to study divinity, went home again,

“because not a copy of the Bible was to be found in Oxford!”

It is not necessary after this to say much about the college students of those times. Oxford, as Matthew Browne says, was simply a rabble of youths in different schools, many of them having no desire or design to study, and only coming to the university town for the sake of companionship and free-living. In Wycliffe's time there were some thousands of such youths in the city of learning, and their morals and their learning were much on a par. The most debasing vices were common among both tutors and pupils, and it is not too much to say that the universities of the fourteenth century were the haunts of bad logic, bad Latin, bad morals, and bad men; and the bright exceptions to this statement, and the treatment they received, only serve to prove and emphasize the rule.

Such is a brief but true sketch of the Papacy in England in the days of John Wycliffe, full five hundred years ago. Then of a truth Rome did lord it over England and over Europe. All the ranks of priest-

craft, from the stately cardinal, in scarlet hat and gilded shoes, to the begging friar, with rope-girt gown and naked feet, swarmed and multiplied and prospered, held their own and ruled the roast in royal palace, baron's castle, lady's chamber, yeoman's manor-house, franklin's kitchen, and the hovel of the boor. Then the bellowing of a Roman bull could make a nation quake, could blanch the cheeks of kings and princes, and make them bend before the sacred envoy from the papal throne. Then the public conscience was bound in chains, and led by priestly masters who dwelt in splendid palaces, stately convents, lordly abbeys, in luxurious ease; who grew rich, and proud, and fat, and filthy, and despotic; who nested on the body politic like parasites, afflicting it with moral and social diseases, so that society became rotten to the core, and true religion, fair morality, and the ordinary decencies of life became as rare in England as, by the good providence of God, the sources of this moral mischief are to-day. The beginning of the end was at hand, and the axe was laid at the root of the tree.

which had so long overshadowed the land
with the widespread blight of its unhallowed
boughs :—

“ All grim and soiled and brown with tan,
I saw a strong one in his wrath,
Smiting the godless shrines of man
Along his path.

The Church beneath her trembling dome,
Essayed in vain her ghostly charm ;
Wealth shook within her gilded dome
With strange alarm.

Fraud from his secret chambers fled,
Before the sunlight bursting in ;
Sloth drew her pillow o'er her head
To drown the din.

‘ Spare, ’ art implored, ‘ yon holy pile ;
That grand, old, time-worn turret spare ; ’
Meek reverence, kneeling in the aisle,
Cried out, ‘ Forbear ! ’

Yet louder rang the strong one’s stroke,
Yet nearer flashed his axe’s gleam ;
Shuddering and sick of heart I woke,
As from a dream.

I looked ; aside the dust cloud rolled—
The waster was the builder too ;
Up-springing from the ruined old,
I saw the new.

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

'Twas but the ruin of the bad,
The wasting of the wrong and ill ;
Whate'er of good the old time had
Was living still.

The outward rite, the old abuse,
The pious fraud transparent grown,
The good held captive for the use
Of wrong alone :—

These wait their doom, from that great law
Which makes the past time serve to-day ;
And fresher life the world shall draw
From their decay."

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMMON PEOPLE.

It is scarcely needful to attempt to sketch the condition of the English people as it was five hundred years ago. What that was like, morally, socially, religiously, under such a pernicious ecclesiastical *régime* as that which I have endeavoured to portray, may be well imagined; it certainly cannot be adequately described. A very cursory perusal of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales will supply sufficiently satisfying evidence of the low and degraded position of women in his days, and of their relationships to the opposite sex. The "wyn-house," and the beer-shop, and the topping habits of the age, come in for perpetual mention, and the coarse jokes and rough innuendoes of the "men in motley" have a strong flavour in full keeping. Having lost all real faith in the divine

governance of men and things, society seems to have given itself up to a sort of fatalistic optimism, that saw in life nothing better or higher than to inspire the motto, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" So sings Greta, the castle-maid of the thirteenth century, in Charles Kingsley's "Saint's Tragedy":—

"Can the sailor move the main ?
Will the potter heed the clay ?
Mortal ! where thy spirit drives,
Thither must the wheels obey.

Neither ask, nor fret, nor strive ;
Where thy path is thou shalt go.
He who made the stream of time
Wafts thee down to weal or woe."

And this the young lady professes to have received from a nun ! This view of things, so thoroughly favourable to unlimited license, is immediately endorsed by the jester who had a popular mission in those days:—

"Then why puzzle and fret, plot and dream ?
He that's wise will just follow his nose ;
Contentedly fish, while he swims with the stream ;
'Tis no business of his where it goes."

This irresponsible view of life must have had some sharp questionings when, in consequence

of the physical and social habits of the time and the utterly unsanitary condition of the streets and houses, the people were swept away in thousands by the pestilence as in the visitation of the "black death" in Wycliffe's own day, which swept into the grave thousands upon thousands, so that the living in many localities were not sufficient to bury their dead, and for want of labour the harvests rotted in the fields.

It must be remembered that though the king and the barons have not appeared in the previous pages as at all in league with the Church in its treatment of the people, and were ready enough at times to rebel against its authority, this was not because they cared for the poor, or evinced the slightest interest in any amelioration of the common lot. Like Hal-o'-the-Wynd, on all such occasions they fought for their own hand, and had as much contempt for the "shoeless villeins" of the commonalty as any other of the ruling classes. We are told that violence or bribery overawed or corrupted justice; that there were none of the king's ministers and judges

who did not receive bribes, and but few who did not extort them. Perjury, says one, was a vice so universal, that the words of Scripture might have found an almost literal application to the English people from king to serf, "all men are liars."

Life and property, too, were perpetually insecure. Might everywhere was apt to take the place of right. Numerous bands of robbers roamed over the country, not seldom under the indirect patronage of the barons, who had their own ends to serve by giving them occasional shelter within their castle gates. But enough has been said on this subject; the picture is dark and dreary, and what is called the dark ages could scarcely be darker than when England was the freehold of the Pope, and when the keepers of the key of knowledge barred the kingdom of heaven against men, and neither went in themselves nor suffered others to enter in.

Such was the England of John Wycliffe's time. Such were the forces against which this Saxon Samson rose up in his might, and in the strength of One who was mightier than he.

He bore down, at first single-handed, upon the defenced citadel of superstition, the strong and apparently impregnable Gaza of the priesthood; he took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts thereof, and went away with them, bars and all! Through the breach he made, and which could never afterwards be repaired, in the fulness of the time the English Reformation rushed in, bearing opposition down before it, and swept the mitred despotism, the tonsured abomination, and all the civil and religious disabilities of which they were the authors and maintainers, away for ever.

Amid the moral wilderness I have briefly endeavoured to depict, the stalwart character of the first reformer stands out in wondrous strength and beauty. Our national history shows no other such splendid singularity. He is a palm-tree in the desert, a cedar of Lebanon among brushwood, a freeman amid a race of slaves. Five hundred years have passed since this great Englishman finished his life-work, but the results of that noble and heroic life can never pass away. His fellow-countrymen, who now rejoice in the splendid heritage of freedom

of which he laid the foundation, in the rich harvest of light and progress of which he sowed the seed amid darkness and tears, may well combine, in admiring recognition of the brave work he did for God and man, to commemorate his death and build a monument to his name.

There is no doubt that, like all other beings "shaped in mortal mould," John Wycliffe had his faults and imperfections, made his due share of blunders and mistakes, and said that which, from our point of view, is hard to be understood; but no consequence of these hath lived to work us harm. Doubtless, if it was proposed to commemorate the death of Peter or of Paul, somebody would object, on the ground that the first had witnessed to a lie, and with bad language too, and that the second could not show by any means a clear record in the matter of his persecution of those who held opinions other than his own.

Taken as a whole, as we shall now see, John Wycliffe's course was manly, and in the main consistent. His life was so blameless that his enemies can frame no indictment against it. As for the sacred mission to which he gave his

life, its fruits continue to this day : his work lives for the glory of God and the good of man through all our empire and right round the world !

“ The good abides, man dies ; dies too
The toil, the fever, and the fret ;
But the great thought, the upward view,
The good work done, these die not yet.
From sire to son, from age to age,
Goes down a growing heritage.”

CHAPTER VIII.

WYCLIFFE'S TREASURE-TROVE.

BUT little is known of Wycliffe's early life, or indeed of his personal history at any time. His work is his history. Like John the Baptist, almost the first thing we hear of him is as a voice, waking the echoes of the moral wilderness, startling the Pharisees of his time out of their lethargy, and saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" or rather, perhaps, he is like Elijah the prophet, confronting the ecclesiastical Ahab's of the day, who charge him with being a "troubler of Israel," but on whom he retorts the charge with holy wrath and indignation.

He was born, it would seem, about the year 1320. Some authorities put it a few years later, and the exact date cannot be ascertained. A secluded spot in a Yorkshire dale, watered

by the Greta and the Tees, is pointed out as his birthplace. The old manor-house of Wycliffe stood not long ago, perhaps stands now, on the brow of a wooded cliff, overhanging the busy stream below, its grey turrets weathered into the sombre colour of the rock. Somewhere in this vicinity my hero first saw the light. It is probable that he received some education at one of the schools which were not seldom found in connection with some abbey church or religious house. His parents designed him for the Church, and it would appear that they sent him to Queen's College, Oxford, then only lately founded by Robert Eaglesfield, confessor to the Queen Philippa. He was at that time sixteen years of age. As a student he rose early to distinction, showing rare ability and remarkable power of application.

He did not find the new institution all that he expected, so he removed to Baliol College, where he applied himself diligently to the peculiar studies of his times, and attained almost unrivalled skill, we are told, in the subtle sophistries, puzzling jargon and hair-

splitting casuistry of scholastic philosophy. He made the civil law, and more especially the canon law, the subject of his study, and won much popularity as a clever disputant in the arena of metaphysics.

About 1360 he became the warden of Baliol, and was soon afterwards presented with the living of Fillingham, residing, however, at Oxford, where his warfare was to be in the main accomplished. Speaking of him as he was in the days of his ripened powers, Mr. Green, that bright and thoughtful historian whose too early death is a national loss, says, "The spare emaciated form of Wycliffe, weakened with close study and asceticism, hardly promised a reformer who would carry on the stormy work of Ockham; but within this frail form lay a temper quick and restless, an immense energy, an immovable conviction, an unconquerable pride. As yet, indeed, even Wycliffe can hardly have suspected the immense range of his intellectual power. It was only the struggle that lay before which revealed in the dry and subtle schoolman, the founder of our later English prose, a

master of popular invective, of irony, of persuasion, a dexterous politician, an audacious partizan, the organiser of a religious order, the unsparing assailant of abuses, the boldest and most indefatigable of controversialists, the first reformer who dared, when deserted and alone, to question and deny the creed of Christendom around him; to break through the tradition of the past, and with his last breath to assert the freedom of religious thought against the dogmas of the Papacy."

How Wycliffe came to have access to or possession of the Word of God, when it was an unknown book to the laity, and with which the vast body of the clergy were as unfamiliar as they, while it was wholly ignored and neglected at Oxford, history does not say. The time of the printing-press had not yet come, and whatever manuscript copies of the Book existed, painfully written by some monkish hand, were precious through sheer scarcity, and, hid away in some convent chest or in the crypt of some abbey church, they were all but totally unknown. His first discovery of the treasure is referred to in one

of his discourses, in which he says that he "happed" upon the Word of God. It was a glorious discovery, big with marvellous results to himself, his country, and the world! Herschel and other astronomers have discovered new stars in the heavens; Watts and Arkwright and others have happed upon revolutionising discoveries in science and mechanics; a fortunate emigrant happed upon Australian placers, and another discovered California's wealthy beds of gold; Columbus found a continent; but Wycliffe's treasure-trove was grander than them all, alike in its intrinsic value and its vast results.

It would appear that he began at a comparatively early period of his college career to be an honest student of theology; that is to say, he was not content to pursue the vain and empty speculations which marked the so-called "divinity" lectures of the times. He appears to have been a truth-seeker from the beginning; and the most distinguished and worthiest Christian writers, from the early fathers of the Church down to Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, were read and studied and

pondered with a view to satisfy both his mind and his heart; for he felt that the religion his own soul required must exercise its gracious influence on both—light for the former, love for the latter—and he was right.

It was while he was at Oxford and engaged in these studies that England was visited with the fearful pestilence known as the Black Death. It is said that one-half of the population of this island was swept away. More than half the priests in Yorkshire were cut down by this disastrous plague. All this was calculated, one thinks, to impress the minds and hearts of gentle and simple with solemn thoughts of soul and death. There is a passage in the *Canterbury Tales* that may well be quoted, in token alike of the fact of the black death and that it did have some warning effect upon the people:—

“ And as they sat they heard a bell clinke
Before a corpse was carried to the grave.
Then one of them 'gan call unto his knave,
'Go forth,' quoth he, 'and axe you readily,
What corpse is that that passeth now forth by;
And look that you report his namè well.'
'Sire,' quod he, 'that needeth never a deal:
It was told ere ye came here two hours;

E

He was Pardy, an old friend of yours,
 And suddenly he was yslain to-night ;
 For, dronk as he sat on his bench upright,
 There came a private thief, men callen *death*,
That in this country all the people slayeth,
 And with his spear he smote his heart a-two,
 And went away withouten wordès mo.
He hath a thousand slain this pestilence.
 And, maister, ere ye come in *his* presence,
 Methinketh that it is full necessary
 For to beware of such an adversary,
And be ready for to meet him evermore.'
 'By Saint Mary,' said the taverner,
 'The lad saith truth ; for he hath slain this year,
 Within a mile and in a great village,
 Both man and woman, child and hind and page.'''

This fearful visitation, as we may well imagine, made a profound and painful impression on the mind of Wycliffe, and it is very probable that it had much influence in producing that severe and serious cast of character, ascetic and self-repressing, which marked his whole career. There is a tract entitled "The Last Age of the Church," which is supposed to have been written by him under the solemn influences of that terrible time. Be this as it may, there is abundant evidence that at an early period of his college career John Wycliffe was the subject of strong religious feelings and convictions, and that his

course of life was a very different affair from that which was understood by life at Oxford, not only in Wycliffe's day, but for many a discreditable century besides.

It was a happy day for John Wycliffe and for England when the *Biblia Sacra* first met his eye. He found the Book, he pondered and he prayed, and lo, the fair and holy form of Truth rose up before him, beautiful exceedingly! Her charms took his spirit captive, and he fell at her feet and worshipped. He had found the Book, and in the Book a Saviour, and in the Saviour a crowned King for his own heart and life! Dark superstitions faded, monkish fables had no value, musty dialectics had lost their power to charm. The Word of God became to him the source of a new and spiritual life, the guiding-star of destiny. Away went metaphysics and all the crude philosophies of the time; away went saints and legends; away went all blind loyalty to Pope and priesthood; away went all self-trusts and confidences! "God forbid," said he, "that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ my Lord."

Says an old Puritan, "The Bible is a rock of diamonds, a chain of pearls, the sword of the Spirit; a chart by which the Christian sails to eternity, the map by which he daily walks, the sun-dial by which he sets his life; the balance in which he weighs his actions, the light which is in his hand and heart to cast upon the path of those who travel near him." If ever mortal man found the Bible to be all that and more, John Wycliffe, that true Bible-lover, was that man. "Above all love I the Word of God," he said, and hence on his life-work was to make it known to others that they might love it too.

"Thy Word, O God, is living yet,
Amid earth's restless strife,
New harmony creating still,
And ever higher life.

And as that Word moves surely on,
The light, ray after ray,
Streams further out athwart the dark,
And night grows into day.

O Word that broke the stillness first,
Sound on, and never cease,
Till all Earth's darkness be made light,
And all her discord peace!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAR COMMENCES.

As early as the year 1360 Wycliffe seems to have come into collision with the begging friars, and according to some authorities the rectory of Fillingham was given to him in acknowledgment of the way in which he had served the interests of the University by checking their inordinate ambition. The members of this religious order swarmed like unclean things all over the land. The Dominican in his not over-clean gaberdine, and the Franciscan in his rope-knotted gown of coarse serge, both tonsured and barefoot, divided the land for a prey. Among the booths and stalls of the market-place on busy week days, under the shadow of the solemn minster at high festivals, in fairs on the village green among tumblers and morris-dancers,

the friar unpacked his wallet, and after a jocular harangue, sold his pardons, masses, and indulgences to the crowd.

The friars had put forth the astounding claim that their religion took precedence in dignity and merit of that of Jesus Christ Himself. According to their doctrine, the truth of God had come to men in three dispensations: the first, contained in the Old Testament, proceeding from the Father; the second, that of the New Testament, proceeding from the Son; and finally, "the everlasting Gospel," proclaimed by the angel of the Apocalypse, who was, they said, no other than Saint Francis, the founder of their order, a dispensation of grace by which all others were superseded for evermore.

This daring presumption Wycliffe did not hesitate to characterise as a lie. He declared that from the foundation upward their system was a fraud on the souls of men, and that their very existence was high treason against Him who had given the Scriptures as the one rule of faith and life. "The friars," quoth he, "pretend that their works of merit go far

beyond the commandment of Christ. Can any man more than fulfil the first and great command, to love God with all the heart, all the mind, and all the strength, and his neighbour as himself? How, then, can any man exceed the demands of Christ? He who pretends to amend Christ's religion, in fact denies it, and is an apostate from the faith." "Christ's religion is most true because confirmed of God, and not of sinful men, and because by it the Pope and every other man must be confirmed, or else he shall be damned; while the new orders, being confirmed only by the Pope, may turn out to have been confirmed only by a devil." That latter sentence shows not only a clear antagonism to the bold pretensions of the friars, but a very decided opinion as to the possibilities attaching to the Pope himself.

Against these parasites on the body politic Wycliffe lifted up his voice with strength. By the favour of the Pope they had invaded the University, their Doctors held its most important offices, exerting an evil influence on the students, large numbers of whom were led to join their order; a state of

things which resulted in lessening, by more than half, the entire number of youths on the college rolls. The friars declared that Jesus Christ was a mendicant, that His disciples were beggars also, and that pious beggary was therefore a gospel institution. By public disputations with them in the halls of Oxford, and especially by a keen and trenchant tract, entitled "On Able Beggary," Wycliffe exploded their theories, showed up the laziness of their lives, the baseness of their conduct, and the greediness of their exactions. Just as Martin Luther became a thorn in the side of Friar Tetzl, so did John Wycliffe goad these consecrated pedlars. He engaged in mortal feud with them, he mercilessly cudgelled them into ignominious silence; for at length they passed a resolution that they would not meet him in public discussion. He swore war to the knife against their unholy traffic, and by the constant blows of his well-knotted scourge, he so belaboured these traffickers in holy things, as largely to drive them out of the temple and from the favour of the unthinking crowd.

It has been suggested by Lechler and others, that Wycliffe's battle against the begging friars did not commence during the earlier, but rather during the latter period of his brave and busy life. In all probability his attack upon their fundamental principles was made at a subsequent period of his career, but the truth seems to be that his was a war of many campaigns, and that from beginning to end he felt and showed that they were enemies of the cross of Christ, glorying in their shame. In a plain-spoken tract, written about 1380, he speaks of these orders in a way easily "understood of the people" to whom it was specially addressed. It is entitled, "Objections to the Friars." In it he makes an indictment against them in which are not less than fifty counts, and he proves them guilty of them all. One extract must suffice :—

"There cometh no pardon but of God. The worst abuses of these friars consist in their pretended confessions, by means of which they affect, with numberless artifices of blasphemy, to purify those whom they confess, and make them clean from all pollution in the eyes of

God, setting aside the commandments and satisfaction of our Lord.

“There is no greater heresy than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sins if he give money, or if a priest lay his hand on his head, and say that he absolveth thee; for thou must be sorrowful in thy heart, and make amends to God, else God absolveth thee not. Many think if they give a penny to a pardoner, they shall be forgiven the breaking of the commandments of God, and therefore they take no heed how they keep them. But I say this for certain, though thou have priests and friars to sing for thee, and though thou, each day, hear many masses, and found churches and colleges, and go on pilgrimages all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners, this will not bring thy soul to heaven. May God of His endless mercy destroy the pride, covetousness, hypocrisy, and heresy of this feigned pardoning, and make men busy to keep His commandments, and to set fully their trust in Jesus Christ.”

The whole tract, from which this is an extract, is equally clear and decisive alike in

its refutation of error and its proclamation of evangelic truth. He concludes it with a few sentences as a summary of the whole matter, among which appears the following :—"The friars being the cause, the beginning, and the maintaining of strife and trouble in Christendom, and of all evil of this world, these errors shall never be amended till the friars be brought to the freedom of the gospel, and clean religion of Jesus Christ."

The ordinary clergy were far from being ill-pleased with Wycliffe's unflagging campaign against the "new orders," as the friars were called, who greatly interfered with their prescriptive rights, and wrought especial damage to the interests of the University. But by and by the priestly satisfaction gave way to strong suspicion and alarm. Step by step the honest truth-seeker was led into clearer light, into larger and broader views of the great Evangel. All this was accompanied by a fuller understanding of the evils under which the land was labouring, and so, while he cried aloud and spared not against the iniquity of the friars, he soon had occasion to expose

with unsparing tongue the abominations of papal government, and the glaring hypocrisies of the priests themselves.

As a contemporary evidence concerning the "Pardoners," this chapter may be fitly closed with an extract from the realistic pages of Geoffrey Chaucer. This is the "Pardoner's" description of his own proceedings:—

"'Lordlings,' quoth he, 'in churches when I preach,
I pain to have a most commanding speech,
And ring it out as loud as doth a bell,
For I can say by rote all that I tell.

First I pronounce whence that I come,
And then my bulls show I, all and some ;
Our liege lord's seal upon my patent,
That show I first my body to warrant,
That no man be so hardy, priest nor clerk,
Me to disturb of Christ His holy work.

Then show I forth my long crystal stones,
I-crammed full of cloutès and of bones,
Relic they be as wot they every one.
Then have I in a tin a shoulder-bone,
Which once was of a holy Jew his sheep.
Good man,' say I, 'take of my wordis keep ;
If that this bone be washed in any well,
If cow, or calf, or sheep, or ox i-swell,
That any worm hath ate, or worm i-stung,
Take water of that well, and wash his tung,
And it is whole anon ; and furthermore,
Of every kind of scab and every sore

Shall every sheep be whole that of this well
 Drinketh a draught ; take heed eke what I tell.
 If that the good-man that the beast oweth
 Will once a week, ere that the cock him croweth,
 Fasting, drink of this well a draught,
 As that holy Jew our elders taught,
 His beasts and store shall multiply,
 And, sirs, it also killeth jealousy !
 By these things have I won, every year,
 A hundred silver marks since I was pardoner.' ”

Chaucer's realism is admitted on all hands. He had no thought of Protestantism or of posterity when he painted this portrait of a popish pardoner. Who can wonder that Wycliffe arose in England, and that the echo of his footsteps did not die out till Luther rose to give a final death-blow to the friar's rule ?

“ O that the free would stamp the impious name
 Of Pope into the dust, or write it there,
 So that this blot upon the page of fame
 Were as a serpent's path, which the light air
 Erases, and the flat sands close behind !
 Ye the oracle have heard ;
 Lift the victory-flashing sword,
 And cut the snaky knots of this foul Gordian word,
 Which, weak itself as stubble, yet can bind
 Into a mass, irrefragably firm,
 The axes and the rods which awe mankind.
 The sound has poison in it—'tis the sperm
 Of what makes life foul, cank'rous, and abhorred ;
 Disdain not then, at thine appointed term,
 To set thine armed heel on this reluctant worm ! ”

CHAPTER X.

THE PAPAL TRIBUTE.

WHEN John Wycliffe was about forty years of age, Pope Urban V. demanded of King Edward III. the payment of a tribute of a thousand marks a year, which had first been exacted from King John when that time-serving monarch held the English throne. It is fair to say, however, that John had done his best to withstand the grasping encroachments of Rome; so much so that, exasperated by his "rebellion against the Holy See," the Pope proceeded to the last extremity of vengeance, and laid an interdict, as it was called, on the whole kingdom. We who live in these days of light and liberty can form but a feeble idea of what this meant in the grim, dark days of old.

"The church doors were closed; the lights at the altar were extinguished; the bells ceased

to be rung; the crosses and images were taken down and laid upon the ground; infants were baptized, if baptized at all, in the church porch; marriages were celebrated in the churchyard; the dead were buried in ditches or in the open fields. No one durst rejoice, or eat flesh, or shave his beard, or pay any decent attention to his personal apparel." There was a curse upon the land, and the curse was felt and groaned under. By the interdict, it was fully believed that he who held the keys of St. Peter had shut and barred the gates of heaven against the English people, and throughout the land was a great cry heard of mourning and lamentation and woe! Poor John gave in at last, promised repentance and submission, and the papal pardon was granted on condition that he should undo all that had been done in restraint of the papal power; that he should acknowledge the Pope as the liege lord of England; and that he should pay an annual tribute of a thousand marks a year as a token that he held his throne and kingdom in fief as the vassal of the wearer of the triple crown!

That cowardly retractation and slavish sub-

mission so enraged the barons that John was compelled at Runnymede to sign the Magna Charta. The Pope annulled it amid much Vatican thunder ; but England stood firm, and for that, at any rate, let the barons have their due meed of praise. In the reign of Edward II. that tribute of a thousand marks, which had ever been paid reluctantly, and latterly with much irregularity, was dropped altogether. Thirty years had passed since then, and now Pope Urban demanded of Edward III. that he should not only resume payment, but should send to the papal coffers all arrears with interest due on the whole amount !

Now John Wycliffe comes to the front as a canon lawyer, as an university authority, as a liberal thinker who had already made his mark. Edward III. was a bold and vigorous ruler, and nothing could be more foreign, alike to his judgment and his patriotism, than to submit tamely to an imposition of this kind. So he called Parliament together in 1366, and put to the representatives of the people whether the honour and independence of England did not demand, as an answer to the

claim of Pope Urban, a final and decisive No!

Wycliffe had become favourably known to John of Gaunt and others who were jealous of further papal encroachments, and he was summoned, with other learned experts, to aid in the counsels of resistance. It is clear that the stout refusal of Parliament to pay the tribute was largely laid at Wycliffe's door, for a violent tractate was issued by the papal party, in which Wycliffe was openly challenged and severely handled for his so-called treason, as a churchman, to the papal power. Wycliffe was not slow to reply, and in his answer gives further proof that he was the inspirer of the response which Parliament made to the proud pretensions of the Pope.

The Pope, quoth he, declares himself the representative of Jesus Christ; he can therefore claim nothing more than Christ claimed for Himself. But Christ refused civil lordship and authority, His office was purely spiritual; as for secular dominion, He would none of it; indeed, so far was He from exercising any temporal power, that He subsisted on charity

and had not where to lay His head. Hence, he argues, England owes no civil allegiance to the Pope, and ought to repel all his aggressions on her liberties, and all his claims to her wealth. Bold words these from a churchman in priest-ridden England more than five hundred years ago !

It is evident that Wycliffe's was a foremost voice in this great controversy. He calls himself "the King's Peculiar Clerk," as a reason for coming to the front, which looks as though he had been selected by his Majesty for the purpose, and probably at the instance of his friend and patron John of Gaunt. There is a grand ring in the sentences in which Wycliffe gives his reasons for repelling the papal claims—reasons which he founds on "the natural rights of men," "the laws of the realm of England," and "the precepts of Holy Scripture." On this grand basis he founds his case, and concludes, "There cannot be two temporal sovereigns in one country. Either Edward is king or Urban is king. We accept Edward of England; we reject Urban of Rome!" The echoes of that manly English voice reverberated through the

Vatican, through England, down the ages; and in the religious liberties that are our glorious heritage to-day, those echoes are ringing yet! With such echoes ringing in their ears, the Parliament of 1366 sent this answer to the Pope's demand—a demand accompanied by a threat that in case of refusal Edward would be summoned to Rome to answer for his contumacy before St. Peter's chair:—

“Forasmuch as neither King John nor any other king could bring his realm and kingdom into such thralldom and subjection but by common consent of Parliament, the which was not given; therefore that which he did was against his oath at his coronation, besides many other causes. If, therefore, the Pope should attempt anything against the king by process, or other matters in deed, the king with all his subjects should, with all their force and power, resist the same.”

Almost immediately after the settlement of this important question, Wycliffe is seen commencing a new crusade, nothing less than the expulsion of the clergy from all secular office. Hitherto the magnates of the Church

had almost a monopoly of civil influence and temporal power. All the chief places of honour and profit were held by churchmen, who had thus a very dangerous preponderance of political weight. The reformer stoutly argued that they ought to mind their own high business; to leave to Cæsar the things that were his own, and to shepherd their hungry flocks. "He that warreth," he said, "entangleth not himself with this life." Prelates and parsons were so busy in the State that they had neither time nor will to serve their rightful Lord. "They had better be bailiffs or sheriffs than ghostly clerks." "They are so occupied in heart about worldly lordships and pleas in business, that no habit of devotion, of praying, of thoughtfulness on heavenly things, on the sins of their own hearts or those of other men may be preserved; neither are they found studying and preaching the gospel, nor visiting and comforting poor men." "Therefore," he declares, "neither prelates nor doctors, priests nor deacons, should hold any secular offices." These novel notions, boldly proclaimed, roused the wrath of the

prelates to the utmost pitch ; for these anointed officials of the Church were loth to loose their greedy fingers from the great prizes of the State. This doctrine Wycliffe maintained on purely religious principles ; but the barons found in it their opportunity, and the axe was laid at the root of another grievance that had long overspread and impoverished the ground it shadowed. It gave birth to one of the most important memorials against the papal power in England that marked this eventful reign. John Wycliffe was now fairly committed to the cause of freedom—freedom not only from the despotism of the Pope, but also from the tyranny of the priesthood, and from the consequent pall of night that “darkened all the land.”

“Champion of those who groan beneath
Oppression’s iron hand,
In view of penury, hate, and death,
I see thee fearless stand,
Still bearing up thy lofty brow
In steadfast sense of truth ;
In manhood sealing well the vow
And promise of thy youth.

Go on ! for thou hast chosen well,
On in the strength of God !

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

Long as one English heart shall swell
Beneath the tyrant's rod.
Speak in a slumbering nation's ear,
As thou hast ever spoken,
Until the dead in sin shall hear,
The fetter's link be broken.

Go on ! the martyr's pile may glare
Amid thy pathway's gloom ;
The fate which sternly threatens there
Is glorious martyrdom.
Then onward with a martyr's zeal,
Press on to thy reward,
The hour when man shall only kneel
Before his Father—God !”

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOSPEL DOCTOR.

IN the year 1372 Wycliffe took his degree as Doctor in Divinity, and at once proceeded to turn the title and the privileges and power it conferred to account in a manner very widely different from the wont and fashion prevalent among the Doctors of his time. His public lectures speedily became the popular topic of conversation in the University; but not content with assailing with unstinted plainness of speech the abuses in the Church, he preached a pure and simple gospel; a clear Christian theology, based not upon traditions, or the fathers, or the fanciful speculations of the schoolmen, but on the Word of God itself, which was ever in his hand, his head and his heart. He taught it with a conviction and a force which won for him the eager ears of all

honest searchers of the truth, and the active hatred of the "Orders," who dubbed him in derision the "Gospel Doctor," and so, all unknowing, crowned him with his highest honour.

The remarkable hold which Wycliffe had upon university life at this time, and the amount of influence he was able to exert as a public teacher and theologian, is indicated by the testimony of a cleric called Knighton, a Roman Catholic historian, who was one of his bitterest opponents.

"As a theologian," says he, "he is the most eminent of his time; in philosophy, second to none; as a schoolman, incomparable. No man excelleth him in the strength of his arguments, and he excelleth all men in the irresistible power of his eloquence."

Peter Walden, another authority of the times, says in a letter to the Pope, that he "had often stood in amazement at the excellence of his learning, the boldness of his assertions, the exactness of his authorities, and the strength of his arguments."

When it is remembered that all this mani-

festation of power was concentrated on the abuses of the Church and the preaching of the true Evangel, some faint idea may be formed of the godly work he did, and of the immortal seed he sowed among the thousands of youth who flocked to hear this preacher of righteousness, this gospel doctor, this morning star of the Reformation, who by a thousand beams of light was guiding England to the Bethlehem of liberty and of truth.

Nor was he content with sowing the seed of the kingdom among the clergy alone. While he was engaged in ordinary college duties, he preached on the Sabbath day to promiscuous congregations the same great truths he had taught his students in the week—preached them in homely mother speech, that the most ignorant could understand; and all the while, and everywhere alike, he attacked, refuted, and condemned, one after another, all the spurious dogmas of Rome, “the craft whereby they had their wealth.”

Even those who shared his opinions and were attached to his doctrines, were alarmed at the boldness and audacity with which he

declared his sentiments. They besought him to remember that all his appeals to Scripture would have little weight with the prelates, who would certainly pounce upon him by and by, and who had no whit of reverence for the Bible as an authority. "No doubt," he replied, "but what you say is true. The chief cause of the existing state of things is our want of faith in Holy Scriptures. We do not sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or we should abide by the authority of His Word as of infinitely greater weight than any other. If we follow this rule, the papal bulls will be superseded, as they ought to be. The veneration of men for the laws of the Papacy will be restrained within due limits." Such were the doctrines proclaimed by the Gospel Doctor—the doctrines of the "glorious Reformation," of which he was the herald and pioneer.

In the vacations and intervals of academic labour he gave himself up to his favourite employment, as preacher and pastor of the poor. First at Fillingham, then at Lutgershall, then at Lutterworth, which latter living

was a presentation from the king in token of his service to the State, he fed his flock like a shepherd, and led his thankful and loving people away from the arid deserts and bleak rocks and dry beds of superstition—led them into the green pastures and by the still waters of the Living Truth of God. More than three hundred of his pastoral sermons continue to this day to tell of his zeal, his fidelity, his power and purity as a preacher of that gospel which is the hope of universal man.

It was a rare sight to see during his later years, that which was constantly seen at rural Lutterworth, when the way-worn evangelist preached to his rustic congregation in homely English, which was so familiar and so pleasant to their ears, after having been mocked with Latin and the mummeries of a soulless creed. It is easy, too, to call up the picture of the good man visiting his scattered flock, staff in hand, clad in russet mantle and rude sandals, dispersing comfort to the mourner and hope and consolation to many in their dying hour. There is little doubt that Geoffrey Chaucer

had the reformer in his mind when he wrote that beautiful sketch of a faithful pastor in his "Canterbury Tales."

"A good man there was of religion,
 And he was the poor parson of a town ;
 But rich he was of holy thought and work,
 He was a learned man also ; a clerk
 That Christ His gospel truly would he preach,
 His parishens devoutly would he teach,
 Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
 And in adversity full patient.

Wide was his parish, houses far asunder
 But he none left, no, not for rain or thunder ;
 In sickness and in sadness for to visite
 The farrest in his parich, much and lite,
 Upon his feet and in his hand a staff ;
 This noble example to his sheep he gave,
 That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught,
 Out of the Gospel he his wordis caught.

He set not out his benefice to hire,
 Nor left his sheep encumbered in the mire ;

Or with a brotherhood lived withhold,
 But dwelt at home and kept well his fold ;
 So that the wolf never made it to miscarry,
 He was a shepherd, and no mercenary ;
 And though he holy were and virtuous,
 He was to sinful men most piteous.

To draw the folk to heaven with fairness,
 By good example, was his business.

He waited for no pomp or reverence,
Nor makèd him a spiced conscience ;
But Christ His love and His apostles twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself."

This is in good sooth a most attractive picture. Doubtless even in that day of desperate darkness such men there were scattered among the provinces of England ; but the sight was rare, all too rare, and it was well that the poet should have thus crystallised into immortality one such "poor parsoun of a toune."

It is worthy of note, to be specially noted by those whom it most concerns, that as soon as John Wycliffe found the truth and realised the joys of the gospel of Jesus in his own heart, he bade farewell to any foreign tongue as a means of delivering his soul ; bade farewell to all the dreary dialectics in which he had been wont to take delight ; bade farewell to all long words and involved sentences, and chose for his handy, serviceable, and most successful weapon in the warfare of the Word, the plain and simple speech of the common people. He spake from the heart to the heart, and the speech itself was hearty, honest, homely, with this sure result, that they did their work, performed

their mission, and, as with living words always, are living still.

Cromwell's word of counsel to his soldiers is an admirable motto for all who desire to reach the hearts of the people with the message which they bring to them for God. "*Fire low!*" If we want to win them, our eloquence, unlike Mahomet's mountain, must come down to them, since they cannot raise themselves up to it. It must come home to their wants and wishes, their hopes and fears.

"I saw one man, armed simply with God's Word,
Enter the souls of many fellowmen,
And pierce them sharply as a two-edged sword,
While conscience echoed back his words again,
Till, even as showers of fertilising rain
Sink through the bosom of the valley clod,
So their hearts opened to the wholesome pain,
And hundreds knelt upon the flowery sod—
One good man's earnest words the link 'twixt them and God."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GOOD PARLIAMENT.

IN the year 1374 King Edward III. issued an important commission, whose task it was to take an exact survey of all the ecclesiastical dignities and benefices attached thereto, which, thanks to the cupidity and favouritism of the Pope, were in the hands of aliens and foreigners. Mr. Green, in his charming "History of the English People," informs us that the tax levied by the Pope in England amounted to five times as much as those which were levied by the king himself. Archbishoprics, bishoprics, abbacies, and the wealthier livings, were all of them in possession of the Pope's own nominees. The deaneries of Lichfield, Salisbury, and York, the archbishopric of Canterbury, together with a host of rich benefices and valuable preferments, were monopolised by Italian cardinals

and priests, who never set foot upon English soil. England was simply a milch cow from which was drained a perpetual flow of wealth solely for the foreigners' behoof. As may be expected, this was as gall and wormwood to Edward and the English people.

Speaking of this crying abomination, Wycliffe says, "The brokers of the sinful city of Rome promote for money unlearned and ignorant caitiffs to benefices of the value of a thousand marks a year, while the poor and learned and deserving hardly obtain one in twenty. So decays sound learning. They present aliens who neither see nor care to see their parishioners, despise God's services, convey away the treasure of the realm, and are worse than Jews or Saracens. The Pope's revenue from England alone is larger than that of any prince in Christendom. God gave His sheep to be pastured, and not to be shaven and shorn."

One commission had been sent to the Pope at Avignon, to remonstrate against this and other abuses, but it had gone on a bootless errand, and returned, as most other applicants for relief from Romish exactions were wont to

return, with cold comfort and empty hands. But Parliament was roused, and determined on a second effort. A second commission was despatched, in charge of the Bishop of Bangor. It is a striking proof of the weight which attached to Wycliffe's opinions and personal character that he was appointed a member of the latter body. They were despatched to Bruges to meet the Papal Nuncio, two bishops and a provost, before whom the English grievances were to be laid. The negotiations were a wearisome business, and dragged but slowly on ; and when they were completed, the relief obtained was so small that matters were nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, for Pope Gregory began to appropriate church revenues on a scale quite as outrageous as if no treaty had been signed. Popery has never been at a loss to find pious reasons for breaking its plighted word. Wycliffe returned to England, as Martin Luther returned from Rome, more than ever disgusted with the Papacy, and the corruption and duplicity of the Papal Court. Henceforth he threw off the last vestige of even a semblance of loyalty

to the triple crown, and proclaimed war to the knife against that national curse of priest-craft which threatened to strangle outright the national life. He was fully convinced that no reformation was possible from pontifical sources, and that if England wished to save her civil and religious liberties from swift and complete destruction, she must sturdily set to and help herself.

In due time Parliament set itself to legislate on the great questions involved, in spite of the Pope, and so popular were its enactments that it came to be called "The Good Parliament." In that priest-ridden age, when the despotism of Rome was a felt fact in England, that parliament was called "good" that checked the encroachments and restrained the advancing pride and power of Popery; and modern parliaments might well read a lesson or two of healthy warning therefrom. In these days Rome lifts her head right boldly, makes large demands on England's patience, fixing her eye upon her former throne of power, and stretching a noiseless hand to the iron sceptre once wrested from her grasp at

the cost of so much blood and so many tears. A spurious liberalism would condone her offences, forgetful of the fact that she never forgets, never repents, but, true to her natural despotism, would rejoice to rivet again the chains which led this land, a bound and bleeding victim, at her chariot-wheel. Meanwhile Popery creeps and prospers, digs silently and secretly, after the fashion of the mole, undermining from Rome hitherward, to meet the treacherous sappers who are tunnelling from England thitherward, and she looks forward hopefully, patiently, intently to the day when this "unfaithful daughter of the Church" shall once again "lie at the proud feet of the conqueror," and resign herself to her former fate as a vassal of the Papal See!

Soon after his return from Bruges, Wycliffe was appointed to the rectorship of Lutterworth, as an acknowledgment from King Edward of his bold and patriotic course, and to mark the royal approval of his conduct alike as a commissioner and as the champion of English independence against the claims of Urban V. At this time, too, as it would

appear, our reformer was favoured with the full confidence and powerful protection and patronage of John of Gaunt. That ambitious, hot-tempered, and withal not too politic prince, backed by a strong party of supporters, was supposed to have an eye to the royal succession, which, owing to the death of the Black Prince, properly devolved on Richard, a minor; and Gaunt may possibly have counted on Wycliffe's support in his own attempt to secure the throne.

But whatever favour was shown to the Gospel Doctor by king or prince or noble, he was profoundly hated by the ecclesiastics, especially by those high in office and in power. The time had now come when a determined effort was to be made to hush the voice of the daring reformer. All the engines of persecution were being prepared to crush the solitary champion of truth and liberty, and to rid the Church of the troublesome agitator who was doing so much to turn men's hearts and intellects away from Mother Church, and to show up the foul misdoings of those who sat in Moses' seat.

A few months after his return from the Continent, an ecclesiastical convocation was held in London, and one of its most important matters of business was to hear accusations and to receive charges against John Wycliffe, as "a person holding and promulgating many erroneous and heretical opinions." Eventually a day was fixed for his solemn trial on the many indictments brought against him. A special summons was despatched to Oxford, requiring his presence at the time and place appointed.

As we look back through all the strange developments of history between that far-off day and this, and call to mind the fierce, prolonged, and bloody nature of the struggle that made England free, that summons sent to Oxford from Convocation is an incident of profound interest and vast importance. It was the first war-cry of the enemy. It was the first blast of Rome's war-trumpet. It was the signal for that battle which was to crimson the soil of England with the blood of her noblest sons and daughters, and was never to cease until the bells of victory should "ring

out the darkness from the land," and "ring in the Christ that is to be." That summons was the first paragraph on the bloody pages of Papal persecution in England, a volume written within and without with lamentation, and mourning, and woe!

"The martyrs! who shall count them,
Who for God and conscience' sake,—
Countless, have faced the screw and rack,
And smiled upon the stake.

Through the dungeon and the torture,
Through death to heaven they trod
With bleeding feet, till caught by fire
They rose to dwell with God!

A sterner strife, a nobler hour,
Old England never knew,
Than when those red-cross knights went forth
To suffer and to do!

With eager cry for 'Liberty!'
They trod the fiery way,
And left behind for us to find
The freedom of to-day!

And hold we will that freedom still
On altar, hearth, and home,
And evermore a close-barred door,
And never a truce with Rome."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STORMY SCENE.

ON the 19th of February in the year 1377 the vast interior of old St. Paul's in London was crowded with clergy and with citizens, while a greater crowd of excited people blackened the large square outside. There were present many prelates and dignitaries of the Church, who, clad in imposing and radiant attire, surrounded the resolute Courtenay, bishop of London, whose central seat was duly conspicuous by its abundant and gleaming emblems of episcopal authority. There was a smile upon his lordship's lip—a smile of conscious power and certain victory; for on this day that arch-heretic, John Wycliffe, was to feel the weight of his judicial hand, and his troublesome tongue was to be hushed to silence once for all!

Wycliffe did not shrink from the conflict. He must have long felt certain in his own mind that to such complexion things must come at last. He was prepared to meet the charge made against him, the nineteen counts of the indictment, with the weapons of Scripture truth. There were many in that waiting and excited crowd who questioned much whether Wycliffe would venture to face that powerful tribunal. Such an act of daring would be a new thing in the earth. There were many Lollards there, as Wycliffe's followers were called; and these, knowing what manner of man he was, had no doubt of his prompt arrival. The question was soon settled, for at the appointed hour the opening crowd made way for the reformer, whose appearance, in simple college gown, staff in hand, and with prematurely bended shoulders and whitening hair, was greeted with cries of approval or dislike, according to the varying temper of those who made up the motley crowd.

The haughty prelate on the judgment-seat was both surprised and enraged to see the heretic doctor upheld and befriended by the

presence of two of the foremost men in England. On the one side of him stood the noble Percy of Northumberland, Earl Marshal of England; and on the other side towered the stalwart form of the third son of King Edward, John of Gaunt, "time-honoured Lancaster." Quoth the latter, as he eyed the imposing splendours of the tribunal, and bent his head toward the Gospel Doctor, "Let not the sight of these bishops make thee flinch—no, not so much as a hair's breadth." It was good counsel, but it was not needed; John Wycliffe was made of sterner stuff. Gaunt had a spirit in accordance with the rough times in which he lived. He had violent passions, was exceedingly hot-tempered—a fact of which he made his friends and enemies alike most painfully aware. In religious matters his notions and practices were somewhat loose, and his efforts to curb the power of the clergy had brought upon him much prelatie wrath.

The bishop, stung to the quick to see the heretic doctor so supported, roughly declared to Percy that if he "had known what masteries they would have kept in church he would

have stopped them from coming there." John of Gaunt, who at that time was practically ruler of the kingdom, took upon himself to answer, gruffly enough, "He shall keep such masteries though you say Nay."

Wycliffe was standing quietly by, waiting to hear the charges. Percy turned to him, saying aloud that he should sit down, "as he had many things to answer, and had need of a soft seat to rest him upon during so tedious an attendance." Whereupon the bishop was hugely offended, and called out that "He must and should stand," and that it was unreasonable that any one on his trial should stand before his ordinary. Percy persisted; so did the bishop; and John of Gaunt, unable any longer to keep the reins of his temper, laid his gloved hand on the hilt of his sword, and said, "Lord Percy's proposal is but reasonable; as for you," frowning fiercely on Courtenay—"you who are grown so arrogant and proud, I will bring down the pride, not of you only, but that of all the prelacy in England." To this the bishop responded with much spirit, "You may do me all the harm you can." The

peppery prince flushed up to the temples ; again his hand sought his sword as he replied, " You are insolent, my lord. You think, no doubt, you can trust to your family, but your relations will have trouble enough to protect themselves." To this low and undignified style of remark the bishop replied, and won much momentary favour by the answer, " My confidence is not in my parents, nor in any man, but only in God, in whom I trust, and by whose assistance I will be bold to speak the truth." Gaunt smiled sardonically, seeing only hypocrisy in the words, and said, loud enough to be heard by many, " Rather than take such language from the bishop, I'll drag him out of church by the hair of his head !"

It was a stupid and foolish speech. It was as a spark of gunpowder. Immediately the dense crowd that filled the church took sides. Most sided with the bishop, who had certainly had the best of it in the wordy strife, but many sided with the prince. A riot at once ensued, fierce, bloody, fatal, not soon to be allayed. Courtenay broke up the court, and the assembly dispersed in confusion. John

Wycliffe, who had stood quietly with folded arms the while, had now permission to retire. He who said, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm," had lashed that sea of opinion into tossing waves, that their advancing surges might lift Wycliffe over the breakers, and land him safe ashore!

But though his enemies were baffled in this their first attempt to silence him, they were not to be restrained from further attempts in the same direction. Their proceedings were now to be invested with an authority neither to be gainsaid nor resisted. A short time after the abortive meeting of St. Paul's had been held, no fewer than five bulls were issued from the papal chair, having for their one object the silencing of the Gospel Doctor. Three bulls were sent to Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, and to Courtenay, bishop of London. Herein they were required to find out whether Wycliffe was really teaching the heresies charged against him. In that case he was to be apprehended; a confession of his views was to be obtained from him, sealed up

and forwarded to Rome. If he could not be apprehended, or was in any way contumacious, he was to be cited, by public proclamation, to appear before the Pope at Rome within three months. They were directed to obtain an interview with Edward III., and command him to aid in putting down this troubler of Israel.

A fourth bull was sent to the king himself, and in it his Holiness urges the king, as a dutiful son of the Church, to extirpate heresy, and to lend his best endeavours to the two prelates who had Wycliffe's case in hand. A fifth bull was sent to the University of Oxford, in which Wycliffe was a foremost official and professor, and of which he was the chiefest ornament.

The Pope herein deploras the poisonous tares that were springing up among the wheat—tares of heresy among the corn of sound doctrine. He declares that this sad change was all owing to the labours of "one John de Wycliffe, Master in Divinity, more properly Master in Error, who hath proceeded to a degree of madness so detestable as to teach

opinions the most false and erroneous, contrary to the faith, and tending to the entire subversion of the Church." Within three months of the mishap in St. Paul's, these five terrible pieces of artillery were fired from the Seven Hills, and all to silence the powerful tongue of Wycliffe, and to quench in the darkness of a dungeon the flaming fire-brand who threatened to set the whole nation in a blaze of ecclesiastical rebellion and heretical revolt! Pope, and archbishop, and bishop, and king, and university; that is to say, Church and State and College are all to combine against him! How terrible to the kingdom of darkness is one man who fearlessly lifts on high the lighted Torch of Truth!

But however the Church might condemn John Wycliffe's conduct, whatever amount of anger the prelates might show against him, the people of England were more than ever ready to lift their voice in his favour. Lollardie, as his doctrines were called, spread in all directions; and the fuss and fume of his enemies only seemed to bring disciples in

larger numbers to the side of the Man of Progress, the declared enemy of Rome. Said the English people, "If he is the weakest in power, he is the strongest in truth." And so it came to pass that the Truth-speaker became more and more a power in the land, and his mighty voice became as the trumpet of freedom to those whose bonds had been more than they could bear :—

"It woke the heart of age and heedless youth,
It woke the spirit of the sleeping land,
It roused them to the voice of holy truth ;
Who could that voice withstand ?

'The Free One makes you free ; He breaks the rod,
He bids you lift your head to sky and sun,
As freemen of the everlasting God,
Kneeling to Him alone.

The Free One makes you free. Be slaves to none,
Priest, prince, or self, in body or in soul ;
Serve thou with all thy strength thy God alone,
Yield but to His control.

The True One gives you truth, a heritage
Richer than that which kings may buy or sell ;
For children's children to the latest age,
Guard ye that treasure well !'

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

Round went the message, over rock and plain,
Like burning words from lips of prophet old ;
Priest, king, and lord opposed the voice in vain ;
It would not be controlled.

Wide o'er the world went forth the new-born day,
Brightening alike the cot, the hall, the throne ;
Long years of darkness vanished at its ray,
Ages of night are gone !”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BAFFLED BISHOP.

No sooner were the Pope's bulls in the hands of the prelates than Courtenay, who felt his hands greatly strengthened thereby, proceeded at once to renew his action against Wycliffe. It is probable that these matters would have seriously affected the reformer's fortunes, but again "something hindered," and the persecuting prelate was once more disappointed of his prey. King Edward III. died, and Richard II., a minor, succeeded him. The king's mother, the widow of the Black Prince, was a woman of spirit, and very friendly to the sentiments of Wycliffe. As her son Richard was but eleven years of age, she naturally exercised considerable influence on the government of the country. John of Gaunt, too, after a season in the shade, re-

sumed much of the influence he had wielded in his father's lifetime; and the University of Oxford showed a decided unwillingness to take action against her noblest son. Courtenay was prudent even in his wrath; he knew that the Commons was still antagonistic to Romish claims, and so he postponed the execution of the bulls, quietly putting them aside a little that he might reproduce them at a more convenient season.

Meanwhile John Wycliffe gave the prelates abundant occasion to nurse their wrath and keep it warm. In the first parliament of King Richard, the work of curtailing the power of Rome, and of lessening the flow of the golden stream that still set steadily towards the papal coffers, was resumed. The land was impoverished by the heavy expenses attached to the war with France, and the Commons saw in the bloated exchequer of the Church a means of aiding the national treasury in its time of peculiar need. It was proposed that all foreigners, whether in the clergy or the religious orders, should leave the kingdom, and that their lands and property should be

applied for the national weal. The income of French clergy alone, arising from English livings, was estimated at £6000 a year, a very large amount indeed as the worth of money was measured in those days. It will be seen, therefore, that not only was the country drained of its resources, but that these passed into the hands of its enemies, and was employed to work its harm. Hence this question presented itself for settlement:—

“Whether the kingdom of England may lawfully, in case of necessity, detain and keep back the treasure of the kingdom for its own defence, that it be not carried away to foreign and strange nations, the Pope himself demanding and requiring the same, under pain of censure, and by virtue of obedience.” That was a difficult parliamentary problem in England five hundred years ago!

In the discussion of these important matters, Wycliffe, probably as a member of the Commons, and certainly as one of the first authorities in the kingdom on the subject, took a constant and important part, and as usual his trumpet sent forth no uncertain

sound. Both in his public speech and by his eloquent and tireless pen he denounces "the proud, worldly priest of Rome." "O Lord," says he, speaking of the prelates, "what token of meekness and forsaking of worldly riches is this! A prelate, as an abbot or prior that is dead to the world, and the pride and vanity thereof, to ride with fourscore horse, with harness of silver and gold, and to spend with earls and barons, both thousands of marks and pounds to maintain a false plea of the world and forbear men of their right!"

Wycliffe's answer to the special question before Parliament goes to the root of the matter.

"Christ saith to His apostles, The kings of the nations rule over them, but ye shall not do so. Here lordship and rule are forbidden the apostles, and darest thou (their successor) usurp the same? If thou wilt be a lord, thou shalt lose thine apostleship, or if thou wilt be an apostle, thou shalt lose thy lordship; for truly thou must depart from one of them. If thou wilt have both, thou shalt lose both. *This is the true form and institution of the*

apostles' trade; lordship and rule are forbidden; ministration and service are commanded. Therefore," he continues, "the goods bestowed on the Pope are not his by right, but simply an alms at pleasure of the giver; and impoverished England is under no obligation to give alms to the Pope, already overloaded with riches. England may detain her treasure for her own defence, despite the Pope's command." With such directness, simplicity, and ease did Wycliffe, with the Word of God for his guide, cut or rather loosen the Gordian knot which had been tightening around the State for centuries, and was at that time puzzling the wisest heads and defying the most determined energies of that age.

It was impossible, however, for the bold reformer to content himself by a mere rebuttal of the Pope's unfounded claims; he must carry the war right into the camp of the enemy. This is what he says, in his clear and caustic fashion, concerning the pride and lordliness of the ecclesiastics of the times in which he lived:—

“These be no true followers of Christ. Christ was poor; they ben rich; Christ was meek and low; they ben full high and proud; Christ forsook worldly glory; they holden it fast. Christ washed His disciples’ feet; they suffer men to kiss theirs even on their knees. Christ went on His feet, and His disciples with Him, to teach the people in wet and dry; the Pope and other bishops will keep their feet full clean, with scarlet and cordwain and sandals, with gold and silver preciously dight. Christ went in great sweat and swink; they sitten in proud castles and *busily keep from sun-burning*. Christ preached and blessen; they cursen and bless full seldom. Christ rode simply on an ass and on His disciples’ clothes; they on fat palfreys, on gilt saddles, full of gay stones and gay harness thereto. Christ made free men; they maken bond. Christ brought out prisoners; they thrust them in. Christ raised men to life; they thrust them down to death.”

Surely there was little wonder that by one party at least John Wycliffe was the best-hated man of his time: nor is it to be wondered at that as soon as Parliament was prorogued,

his Grace of London thought that it was time to strike another blow with a view to silence their persistent foe. A special synod was convened at Lambeth, and Wycliffe was cited to appear before it, on the strength of the Pope's bulls. The reformer lost no time in obeying the summons; but this time he stood alone. The political influence of John of Gaunt was not great just then, and Wycliffe had assumed a direct antagonism to Pope and prelate, such as might well make the boldest pause. A written statement of his many heresies was handed to him, to all which he was solemnly called upon to make reply. His answers were given in a very full and lengthy document, on which his enemies have charged him with contradiction, evasion, and falsehood; yet, at the same time, they have declared it a recantation, so their testimony, to say the least, is no more trustworthy than his own. It must ever be remembered that we have only such prejudiced historians as Walsingham and Knighton to guide us; and if we may judge from all that followed, Wycliffe must not only have refused any recantation, but maintained

his positions with the strong consistency which was one of the most marked features of his character.

In this document he declares that political dominion and secular government belong to the laity and not to Peter and his successors; and that it is lawful for the secular power to take away temporalities from churchmen who habitually misuse and abuse them, and this "notwithstanding excommunication or any other church censure." That at any rate does not read either like an evasion or a recantation. He maintains that "the Pope himself may be charged and proceeded against" for wrong-doing, as "he is liable to sin as well as we," and that the laity may "medicinally reprove and implead him and seduce him to lead a better life."

We can well understand what the issue of this trial would have been; but it was averted as suddenly and as unexpectedly as the last abortive action in St. Paul's. On that occasion his rescue was due to the patronage of John of Gaunt and of the great barons; on this occasion his deliverance was largely owing to the

London citizens. Wycliffe's opinions were rapidly spreading, and the great majority of the Londoners were beginning to look upon John as a prophet. His friends did not like the idea of this secret tribunal, and determined to interfere. "Every other man you meet is sure to be a Lollard," says Richard Knighton, complainingly; and so the streams of people converging towards Lambeth and the judgment-hall were both broad and strong. The excited crowd grew tumultuous, crying out that they would suffer no wrong to be done to Wycliffe. They burst open the door of the council-room and loudly demanded his release.

While Courtenay, somewhat non-plussed by this demonstration, was considering what it was best to do, Sir Louis Clifford, the Usher of the Black Rod, appeared with an injunction from the queen-mother. She forbade any sentence whatever to be pronounced on the prisoner. The prelates judged it safer to submit. Here was an awkward combination of royal authority and popular will, and so for the third time the Bishop was baffled, the bird escaped from the fowlers, and John Wycliffe

peacefully went his way. In the indignant words of Walsingham, one of their own historians, a panic fear seized on the bold churchmen ; they became " as a reed shaken with the wind, and grew soft as oil in their speech, to the manifest forfeiture of their dignity and the injury of the whole Church. With such fear were they struck that one would have thought them as a man who hears not or in whose mouth there are no reproofs." Again He who said, " Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm," had interfered to guard His own. In spite of all enmities, plots, and hatreds, " this man was immortal till his work was done;" and to this man " obstacles were subservient to success."

Now as then, the wise and bold
 All the powers of nature hold
 Subject to their kingly will;
 From the wondering crowds ashore,
 Treading life's wild waters o'er,
 As upon a marble floor,
 Moves the strong man still.

Still, to such, life's elements,
 With their sterner laws dispense
 And the chain of consequence
 Broken in their pathway lies;

Time and change their vassals making,
Flowers from icy pillows waking,
Tresses of the sunrise shaking
 Over midnight skies.

Still, to earnest souls, the sun
Rests on towered Gibeon,
And the moon of Ajalon
 Lights the battle-grounds of life.
To his aid the strong reverses,
Hidden powers and giant forces,
And the high stars in their courses
 Mingle in his strife !”

CHAPTER XV.

THE RIVAL POPES.

FOR the space of three years or more, John Wycliffe was permitted to pursue a comparatively quiet and unmolested course, and to prosecute the work that lay nearest to his heart with a minimum of hindrance from his enemies. It was probably at this time that he commenced, and with the aid of Nicholas Hereford, John Purvey, and others, pushed forward almost to completion, the crowning work of his life, the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the common people. During this period too, both at Oxford and Lutterworth and elsewhere, he and his "godly gospellers," of whom more by and by, scattered the good seed of the kingdom without hindrance or pause. The fact is, that other matters absorbed the interest and attention

of those who were mainly interested in the Roman See.

In the year 1378 Pope Gregory XI. died, and was succeeded by the Neapolitan Archbishop Barri, who took the title of Urban VI. He was both haughty and arbitrary, and was profoundly disliked by a powerful section of his subjects. The cardinals especially were in a condition of chronic wrath, and at last they openly rebelled against him. They pretended to find a flaw in his election, declared it null and void, and made solemn choice of another bishop, who was titled Clement VII., to reign in his room and stead. These rival popes wrangled so hotly for the triple crown, and were supported, each of them, by so strong a following, that for nearly fifty years the schism continued; France, Scotland, Savoy, Lorraine, Castile and Arragon supporting Clement; while Italy, England, Germany, Sweden, Poland and Hungary acknowledged the more reasonable claims of Urban VI. This quarrel led to bloody conflicts and grievous strife; and as Thomas Fuller quaintly puts it, "St. Peter's chair was like to have been broken by

two sitting down in it at once." These two infallible heads of the Church proved, both of them, to be uncommon masters of abusive speech and coarse invective. They accused each other of being "a heretic, a Simonist, an impostor," and other terrible things, not the worst proof, as somebody says, of their infallibility.

John Wycliffe was not slow to take advantage of this desperate feud between the rival Popes, in the interest of truth and liberty in England. He issued a powerful tract, entitled "On the Schism of the Roman Pontiffs," which was reproduced rapidly by the pen of the ready writers, and in which he clearly shows that little credit was due to either of the contending parties; that something more might be said in favour of Urban than Clement, but that both of them partook so much of the "Old Man of the Mountain" character, that Europe might well desire to be rid of them. The people, so long ecclesiastically oppressed and misgoverned, would do well, he thought, to turn the quarrel to their own advantage. Especially did he urge this upon England.

“Now is the time,” quoth he, “to cast off the yoke of Rome. God is helping us; for He hath cloven the head of antichrist into two pieces, and hath made the one half to fight against the other.”

The publication of this tract made a great impression both in the University itself and among the Commons. It was almost immediately followed by another, and that again by a third. He, at any rate, was resolved to get from the papal schism all the aid he could in bringing light and liberty to his native land. “Emperors and kings,” he said, “should help in this cause to maintain God’s law, to recover the heritage of the Church, and to destroy the foul sins of clerks, saving their persons. Thus should peace be established and simony be destroyed.” “Simon Magus never laboured more in the work of simony than do these priests. And so God would no longer suffer the fiend to reign in only one such priest; but for the sin which they had done, made division among two, so that men, in Christ’s name, may the more easily overcome them both.” In the course of time, Henry le

Spencer, the warrior bishop of Norwich, proclaimed a crusade against Pope Clement, resolved to settle the question by the sword. This aroused John Wycliffe's wrath, and he wrote a powerful tract against the scheme. "For the Pope," he says, "to summon to a war is utterly opposed to the mind of Christ; the quarrel is but for worldly power and mastery, a very mark of antichrist; the schism of the Pope is like nothing so much as the quarrel of two dogs about a bone. Let the secular rule take away the bone, that is the secular power, and the quarrel will collapse!" Not very reverential this, either to Urban or Clement; but by this time Wycliffe's eyes were fully open, the Pope had come to be synonymous with antichrist, and in the most trenchant fashion, and with a persistency, diligence, and zeal that almost surpasses belief, he wrote, preached, discussed, and taught the great Evangel, stripped of all the superstitions and accretions of the Papacy. "God forbid," said he, "that I should glory save only in the cross of Jesus Christ my Lord."

At length, worn out by incessant toil, for

tract after tract left his prolific pen, and his tongue was seldom silent, he was seized with an alarming illness at Oxford, and, as was generally believed, was about to die. The news of his approaching dissolution was received with widely different emotions by the different classes of the community. His disciples in the schools of Oxford, of which there was evermore a growing number, heard of it with sorrow and with tears. Those who had learned to look on Wycliffe as the all-essential spokesman for the people, mourned an impending national loss; but the clergy, and especially the religious orders, saw in this event a subject of congratulation and rejoicing.

His old enemies, the begging friars, had long been hoping for some imperative act of suspension against him, and they welcomed his collapse with exceeding joy. They hoped, too, that his season of sickness would also be a season of weakness. They argued that however bold the arch-heretic might have been while in comparative health and strength, yet when the time of sickness and of death

drew near, he would be sure to desire again the succour and the safety which only Mother Church could assure to him. They resolved, therefore, to get a penitent confession from him of his harsh usage of their order. A recantation of his strong sentiments against the friars obtained from John Wycliffe would be as effective in their interests as a new warrant from the Pope himself. But they soon discovered their mistake. No power on earth could bend that gnarled oak, or break the steadfast and undaunted spirit lodged in that weak house of clay.

A deputation of four doctors of divinity, with four aldermen of Oxford with them, to give force and authority to their mission, entered Wycliffe's chamber and gathered round the couch whereon he lay gasping for the laggard breath that almost refused to come at call. They reminded him of all the hard sentences he had uttered against the friars, of all the sore damage which he had brought upon their order. They admonished him that his end was at hand, and besought him, for his soul's sake, to repair the injury he had done

them, and to retract his scathing words. "You have death on your lips," said they; "be touched by your faults, and retract in our presence all that you have said to work us harm."

Wycliffe listened in silence until each voice had told its tale. They waited eagerly for his reply. Did they nurse the hope that this crowning triumph would be theirs? Were they on the eve of going forth to give Lollardie its sorest blow, by announcing that the grim and powerful malcontent had struck his flag, and received their gracious shrift? If so, their expectation was doomed to a prompt disappointment. Wycliffe, too weak to rise unaided, beckoned a servitor to his assistance. The man lifted him up and sat behind him. Leaning his frail frame against the strong form of the serving-man, he fixed his eyes upon them—eyes which shone like an eagle's out of the hollow caverns which disease had made—and calling up a momentary strength he exclaimed, "I shall not die, but live, and again declare the evil deeds of the friars!" What answer they made, history does not say,

but doubtless it was to the effect that such a hardened heretic was past redemption. The reformer speedily recovered ;

“ Free, the needed truth to speak,
Right the wronged, and raise the weak,
And to level manhood bring
Lord and peasant, serf and king ;
And the Christ of God to find
In the humblest of his kind.

His to work as well as pray,
Clearing thorny wrongs away ;
Plucking up the weeds of sin,
Letting heaven's warm sunshine in ;
Watching on the hills of faith,
Listening what the Spirit saith
Of the dim-seen light afar,
Growing like a nearer star.”

CHAPTER XVI.

WYCLIFFE'S "POOR PRIESTS."

By close and constant study of Holy Scriptures, Wycliffe had come to certain clear conclusions respecting the preaching of the gospel, and these now began to bear fruit of a far-reaching and most important kind. "In the primitive Church," says he, "two orders of the clergy were sufficient, that is a priest and a deacon; presbyter and bishop were one and the same office. All other degrees and orders have their origin in the pride of Cæsar." He utterly and indignantly denied to every member of the clerical order alike all excommunicating, absolving, or legislating power; "their business," says he, "is the ministry of the Word." Anything further was an invasion of the prerogatives of Christ. "The highest service to which man may attain on earth is to preach

the Word of God. This service falls peculiarly to the priests, and therefore God more straitly demands it of them. Hereby should they produce children to God, and this is the end for which God wedded the Church. It might indeed be good to have a son who were lord of this world; but better far to have a son in God, who, as member of holy Church, shall ascend to heaven. And for this reason Christ left other works, and occupied Himself mostly in preaching; and thus did His apostles, and for this God loved them. Jesus Christ, when He ascended into heaven, commanded it especially to His disciples to go and preach the gospel freely to all men. So also when Christ spoke last with Peter, He bade him thrice, as he loved Him, to feed His sheep; and this a wise shepherd would not have done if he had not himself loved them well. In this stands the office of a spiritual shepherd. And as the bishops of the temple hindered Christ, so is He hindered now by the hindering of this deed. Therefore Christ told them that at the day of doom, Sodom and Gomorrah should fare better than they. And thus if our bishops

preach not themselves, and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sin of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ."

Besides all this, our great reformer held that all ecclesiastical endowments were against the spirit of the New Testament, and that they were one principal cause of the corruption of the priesthood. He does not think much better of tithes. "Men wonder highly why curates are so severe in exacting tithes, since Christ and His apostles took none; neither paid them, nor even spoke of them. Christ lived on the alms of holy women, as the Gospel telleth; and the apostles lived, sometimes by the labour of their hands, and sometimes took a poor livelihood and clothing, given of free-will and devotion by the people, without asking or constraining." "Paul proved that priests, preaching truly the gospel, should live by the gospel, and said nought of tithes. Certainly, tithes were due to priests in the old law; but it is not so now in the law of grace." "Lord! why should our worldly priests charge Christian people with tithes, offerings, and customs, more than did Christ

and His apostles? *Would to God that all wise and true men would inquire whether it were not better to find good priests, by free alms of the people, with a reasonable and poor livelihood, to teach the gospel in word and deed, as did Christ and His apostles.*" He further declares that mere "ordination by a bishop confers no 'fitness,' and can give no grace for the sacred office of the ministry. The fitness must come from God only." It is easy to see by these extracts from Wycliffe's writings that the establishment of the guild for "poor priests" was just the natural outcome of slowly-ripened views as to what the Bible teaches concerning a gospel ministry. "The Bible and the Bible only" was the one court of appeal held decisive by this truly remarkable man.

He brought the matter before the students of the University, solemnly appealed to their consciences, and rapidly raised a corps of evangelists, who spread themselves through all the land to tell to gentle and simple the story of the Cross. "If begging friars," said he, "stroll around the country teaching lies

and legends, we must also take the pilgrim's staff, and do for the love of Christ what they do to fill their wallets." In another place he says, "Jesus Himself did the lessons that He taught. The Gospel tells how He went about, in places of the country both great and small, in cities and castles, or in small towns, and this that He might teach us to be profitable to men everywhere. Christ sought man's soul, lost through sin, thirty years and more, with great travail and weariness, and many thousand miles upon His feet, in cold and storm and tempest." These and such like convincing words stirred the souls to whom they were addressed like the blast of a trumpet, and rallied round him a band of earnest young missionaries, glowing with zeal for the salvation of men's souls.

"Like the seventy sent out by Christ, they went on foot, clad in coarse garments, the pilgrim's staff in their hands, and some portion of Holy Scriptures carefully hid in the bosom of their gowns. Wherever they found an audience—in church or churchyard, market-place or fair,—they proclaimed the simple,

saving evangel of Bethlehem and Calvary. Their own blameless lives enforced their doctrines. Asking nothing, they thankfully received what was offered to meet their simple wants. Whole counties became pervaded with their doctrines; and in the course of a little while, the prelates began to see their craft in danger from this growing guild, and plotted to overthrow it. They rightly judged that an unrestricted gospel itinerancy of this kind would lead to very awkward results for them. The Lollard preachers, as they were called, must be silenced at all costs.

But, nevertheless, the poor priests increased still in numbers and in power. The loving exhortations of John Wycliffe were more powerful than all the mandates of the prelacy. "Go," said he, "and preach the gospel; it is the holiest work on earth. But don't imitate the priests whom we see, after sermons, sitting in the alehouses or at the gaming-table, or wasting their time in hunting. Go, preach! visit the sick, the aged, the poor, and blind, and lame, and lead them to the loving Christ." The words acted like a bugle-call. Young

men of education, of family, of wealth, literally "left all" to follow this laborious calling; and donning the coarse frieze gown and leathern girdle, wandered everywhere, preaching and teaching, living on the gifts of the people, satisfied with the humblest shelter and the plainest food.

Persecution, as we shall see by and by, grew hot and fierce against these men, and armed with the king's mandate, the myrmidons of the clergy hunted them from place to place. Monks, priests, and friars set themselves to work. They watched the Lollard missionary from the windows of their cells; stood in the shade of houses, crouched themselves low at street corners and cross roads; hid behind hedges, and as soon as they spied the pilgrim preacher at his work, away they hied to fetch the man of law. Not seldom the bold Lollard was surrounded with a body of stout defenders, armed with trusty quarter-staff or sword, who stood like a strong barrier between the poor priest and the constable, until the purposed victim escaped by another way.

“ Prelates and abbots, mendicants and monks, rectors and curates became wrathful, but the people were not wrathful. Almost to a man they attest that the pilgrim-preacher is right, and that harm shall not be done to him. Proud churchmen thunder their anathema against him ; to him it is an empty sound.” The bailiff, or the sheriff, or the constable cites him to appear before the bishop ; to him the citation is of no avail. “ The soul underneath that coarse garb, and which plays from beneath that weatherworn countenance, is an emancipated soul.” These men were wonderfully owned of God in Wycliffe’s lifetime ; and their successors, at the peril of their lives, kept the torch of gospel truth alive in England right through the dark and stormy years that intervened between the death of Wycliffe and the translation of the Bible by William Tyndale, and its dispersion through the land.

It may well be questioned whether any better monument could be reared in Wycliffe’s honour as the result of the quincentenary celebration of his death, than the establish-

ment of a similar guild of godly gospellers to-day in the interests of evangelical religion among the rural poor. It is among the villages and hamlets of England that priestcraft, or that which apes it so far as an elastic law will allow, is most dominant; it is in the rural districts that what is left of the old papal leaven still dooms to spiritual right and to a species of enslavement the unfortunate rustics who dwell under the lingering shadows of the olden time; and there is no doubt that a modern evangelist in many of these districts would have a taste of the persecution to which his predecessors, the poor priests, were subject in a less free and enlightened age.

A rural mission of earnest evangelists, something after the fashion of the city missions in London and elsewhere, would do much to carry the unshadowed light of the gospel into dark places, and would worthily perpetuate Wycliffe's honoured name by doing the selfsame work which was so dear to his heart, and which did such wonders in his own day. What John Greenleaf Whittier says of George Whitefield may well be said of John Wycliffe himself, for

what was he other than a "poor priest?" may well be said of his brave band of gossellers, may well describe the rural missionaries that we want to-day. He

"Stands

In the temple that never was made by hands,
Curtains of azure, and crystal wall,
And dome of the sunshine over all !
A homeless pilgrim with dubious name,
Blown about on the winds of fame ;
Now as an angel of blessing classed,
And now as a mad enthusiast.
Called in his youth to sound and gauge
The moral lapse of his race and age,
And, sharp as truth, the contrast draw
Of human frailty and perfect law ;
Possessed by the one dread thought that lent
Its goad to its fiery temperament.
Up and down the world he went,
A John the Baptist, crying—Repent !"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ATTACK ON THE CITADEL.

IN the year 1380, Wycliffe, who had attacked in turn all the out-works of the Papacy, ventured on a bold assault on the very citadel itself, the central doctrine of Transubstantiation. This dogma of Papal Rome dates back from the ninth century. It was at once seen by the prelacy that in the new doctrine, vigorously maintained, their great strength would lie. From that day to this they have clung to it with unflinching pertinacity. And no wonder; for if the officiating priest can really transform the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ, then his highest pretensions are well warranted, and he has a right to demand unqualified submission and implicit obedience. But if this chief cornerstone of the papal edifice is knocked from

under it, the whole pile must totter, the entire fabric will collapse and come crashing to the ground.

John Wycliffe's tireless and conscientious study of Holy Scripture led him gradually but surely to a true conception of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper. After many shifting uncertainties and changes of opinion, he threw the whole doctrine of transubstantiation overboard, and boldly laid down the thesis and challenged contradiction, that "the bread upon the altar is not the body of Christ, nor any portion thereof, and that to teach otherwise is in direct contradiction to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the evidence of human reason." This was touching the very apple of the papal eye.

He asks, in "The Wyckett," "May the thing made turn again and make him that made it? Thou, then, that art an earthly man, by what reason mayest thou say that thou makest thy Maker? Were this doctrine true, it would follow that the thing which is not God to-day, shall be God to-morrow; yea, the thing that is without spirit and life, but grow-

eth in the field by nature, shall another time be God! And yet we ought to believe that God is without beginning and ending!" Again he says, "Christ saith I am a very vine; wherefore do ye not worship the vine for God as ye do the bread? Wherein was Christ a very vine? or wherein was the bread Christ's body? It was a *figurative* speech, which is hidden to the understanding of sinners. And thus, as Christ became not a material or earthly vine, nor a material vine the body of Christ, so neither is material bread changed for its substance into the flesh and blood of Christ."

By and by he writes upon this subject with growing force and certitude. "Of all the heresies," he says, "that ever sprung up in the Church, I think there is not one more artfully introduced by hypocrites or one imposing such manifold fraud upon the people. It repudiates the Scriptures; it wrongs the people; it causes them to commit idolatry. It is not reasonable to suppose that God can have designed to put confusion on that intelligence which He has Himself implanted in our nature. Of all the external senses that God hath bestowed on

man, touch and taste are the least liable to err in the judgment they give. But this heresy would overturn the evidence of these senses, and without cause; surely the sacrament which does that must be a sacrament of antichrist. Let the knowledge obtained by our external senses deceive us, and the internal senses will, of necessity, fall under the same delusion. But what can have moved the Lord Jesus Christ thus to confound and destroy all power of natural discernment in the senses and minds of His worshippers?"

In his *Triialogus*, he says, with his customary vigour, "It is as if the devil had been scheming to this effect, saying, 'If I can, by my vicar Antichrist, so far seduce believers as to bring them to deny that this sacrament is bread, and to believe in it as a contemptible quality without substance, I may after that, and in the same manner, lead them to believe whatever I may wish; inasmuch as the opposite is plainly taught, both by the language of Scripture and by the very senses of mankind. Doubtless, after a while, these simple-hearted believers may be brought to say, that however

a prelate may live, be he effeminate, a homicide, a simonist, or stained by any other vice, this must never be believed concerning him by a people who would be regarded as truly obedient.' But, by the grace of God, I will keep clear of this heresy, which teaches that if the Pope and cardinals assert a certain thing to be the sense of Scripture, therefore so it is; for that were to set them above the apostles."

It will be clearly seen from all this, that in this matter of transubstantiation, as in all other, John Wycliffe followed no other guide but the simple utterances of the Word of God. That Rule of Life was all-sufficient and all in all; an infallible guide, that whoso followed could never be led astray. The concluding words of "The Wyckett" are worthy of being inscribed in letters of gold:—

"Let every man wisely, with much care and great study, and also with charity, read the word of God in the Holy Scriptures. Now, therefore, pray we heartily to God that this evil time may be made short, for the sake of the chosen men, as He hath promised in His Holy Gospel, and that the large and broad

way to perdition may be stopped; and that the strait and narrow way which leadeth to bliss may be made open by the Holy Scriptures; that we may know what is the will of God, to serve Him with truth and holiness, in the fear of God, that we may find by Him a way to bliss everlasting. *So be it.*"

Of course such a bold utterance as this on so vital a subject as the consecrated host, was sure to bring matters to a crisis. In the spring of 1381 the reformer challenged the University to a public discussion of this great question. "The consecrated host," said he, "as seen upon the altar, is not Christ, or any part of Him; but it is an effectual sign of Him, and the doctrines of transubstantiation, identification, impanation, have no basis in Holy Scripture." The gauntlet was fairly thrown; but it was not the policy of Rome to pick up the glove. The prelates, under the strong control of Archbishop Courtenay, were bent upon silencing the heretic. That was the way, her customary way, in which the Papacy met the challenge of the reformer; that was the way, her customary way, in which she sought to

purge the University from the awful sins of heresy and schism.

Nothing that Wycliffe had ever said or done had made such a commotion in Oxford as this bold and determined attack on the citadel of the Papacy; and Courtenay had good reason to say, as it is reported of him, "If we permit these heretics to inflame the passions of the people, our destruction is sure. We must silence these Lollards." The archbishop was right. Wycliffe's attitude was as bold, and his doctrines were fraught with consequences as fatal to the Papal See, as when Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door at Wittemberg a few score of years later on. Surely, in making this brave, bold, and oft-reiterated protest against the major-craft of priests, Wycliffe is seen almost at his worthiest and best. It was a holy effort to rescue the sacred Supper of our Lord Jesus from the unholy subtleties and sleight of men; and in these days, when the meddlesome influence of an overweening sacerdotalism is again casting its evil shadow over the simple tokens of our Redeemer's dying love, John Wycliffe's stout

cry of "Hands off" may well be echoed anew by all who glory in the simplicity of the gospel, and find salvation and acceptance in the finished work of Christ.

"Are the words and thoughts of other days,
 The martyr-words and thoughts, and above all
 The martyr-deeds of men whose hair
 Grew grey before its time, and o'er whose thoughtful brow
 Age drew its furrows, prematurely deep,—
 Are these old words and thoughts and noble deeds,
 But meant for them who heard and saw them then,
 But overdated now, unsuitable
 For manhood and full age, like that to which
 We have attained in those our riper times ?
 It cannot be so ; truth is ever true,
 In this age or the last, and error false
 To-day as it was yesterday. No age
 Can outgrow truth, or can afford to part
 With the tried wisdom of the past, with words
 That centuries have sifted, and on which
 Ages have set their seal, and handed down
 From venerable lips of solemn men,
 Who learned their wisdom in a graver school,
 And in an age of keener, sorer conflict
 Than we have known in this gay holiday.
 Guard, then, these ancient wells, those living springs,
 Of which our fathers drank and were refreshed.
 These venerable names
 And words preserve, as an inheritance
 For children's children to the latest age."

CHAPTER XVIII.

" THE TRUTH MUST PREVAIL."

WYCLIFFE'S most determined and powerful opponent, Courtenay, long time bishop of London, had been elevated to the primacy. From this superior coign of vantage he set himself to the congenial task of attacking anew the Gospel Doctor and his heretic band, with a firm resolve to put down with a strong hand the mischief which was so sorely militating against the interests of Mother Church. He was the more eager to resume the fight because of the notable increase of poor priests ; of Wycliffe's daring words about the Eucharist ; and because he saw, or thought he saw, in the "revolt of the peasantry" under Wat Tyler, an instrument ready to his hand whereby he could strike a more fatal blow.

"The people of Kent, Essex, Sussex, and

Bedford," says the old chronicler Froissart, "began to stir because they were kept in great bondage; and in the beginning of the world, they said, there were no bondsmen." It seems to have been a sort of communistic outbreak, borne of the evil lot and heavy taxation peculiar to the common people of the time. It assumed alarming proportions, and much mischief was done by the insurrectionists, who were influenced by one John Ball, a Kentish priest, to deeds of reckless destruction. These fierce and lamentable excesses culminated in the murder of Courtenay's predecessor, Archbishop Sudbury, and certain other of "the king's evil counsellors."

It was a shrewd idea of the persecuting Courtenay to associate Wycliffe and Lollardie with that futile spasm of rebellion; and for a time it doubtless served his purpose well in embittering the king and the Lords against the reformer and all his works. It failed to exercise much influence on the Commons, however; and nothing can be clearer than that Wycliffe and the insurrection were in no way akin, except perhaps in this, that the Lollard doctrine that

all men are equal in the sight of God, may have helped to bring to a head the spirit of rebellion against manifest and manifold injustice.

In 1382 Wycliffe was cited to answer the charge of heresy in the monastery of the Black Friars. It is not certain whether the reformer was personally summoned, or whether the conference was held to decide what best to do with him and the growing guild of gossellers who obeyed his call. At any rate, it is evident that he did not appear. While the council was sitting a dreadful earthquake, which was felt in many parts of England, shook the building, and the affrighted bishops and doctors threw down their papers, crying out that the business they were about was angering Providence. Courtenay, with a wit and courage that must be admired, held his ground. "If the earthquake portends anything," said he, "it is the approaching downfall of heresy. Noxious vapours lodged in the bowels of the earth are expelled by these violent concussions; so by our strong endeavours the country shall be purified from the pestilent

taint of Wycliffe's doctrines which have infected every place." Gathering courage hereupon, they entered warmly into the business which had brought them together. As may be imagined, John Wycliffe was most severely handled in his absence, and resolutions condemnatory of his doctrine and calling for condign punishment were passed to their hearts' content.

But it was one thing to pass penal resolutions in a church synod and quite another thing to get them through Parliament. The Commons especially was at that time in a temper not at all favourable to such a consummation, however the priests might regard it as devoutly to be wished, so they strove to win their ends by guile. They succeeded in obtaining the consent of the king and the concurrence of the Lords. Then the decree against the Lollards, which would have made short work of them, was secretly and dishonestly placed upon the statute book without troubling the Commons at all upon the matter! John Wycliffe soon detected this "piece of sharp practice," which had put the gagging clauses into the law of the land, and the Commons made such a strife

about it that they were ultimately erased, and the rage of the baffled prelates waxed seven times hotter than before !

The dastardly conduct of his opponents in the matter of the smuggled statute brought our reformer to the front in a series of tracts and public utterances of the most trenchant kind. He himself addressed a memorial to the House of Commons, demanding the abolition of the monastic orders and the release of the members from their vows. He called for the interference of the State to make the Church surrender its endowments ; and asked for a just reapportionment of tithes and offerings among the deserving clergy. One quotation will show the character of this daring document—"I demand that the poor inhabitants of our towns and villages be not constrained to furnish a worldly priest, often a vicious man and a heretic, with the means of satisfying his ostentation, his gluttony, his licentiousness ; of buying a showy horse, costly saddles, bridles with tinkling bells, rich garments and soft furs, while they see their wives, children, and neighbours dying of hunger !"

Once more the wrathful Courtenay, indignant at the withdrawal of the statute placed upon the national code by craft, attacked the reformer, and this time with a far greater measure of success. He held a provincial synod at Oxford, where the party fight was now growing fast and furious. Dr. Barton, vice-chancellor of the University, assembled a secret council of twelve theological doctors, eight of whom were members of the religious orders. Wycliffe's doctrines were again affirmed to be "bad, erroneous, mischievous, and heretical." Finally it was decreed that "if any person, of whatever degree, state, or condition, shall in future publicly teach such doctrine in the University, or shall listen to one so teaching, he shall be suspended from all scholastic exercises, shall be liable to the greater excommunication, and shall be committed to prison!" And for this they obtained the warrant of the king.

Meanwhile Wycliffe obeyed the summons of the archbishop. Worn, feeble, and aged, he might well have sought excuse, but true to the steadfast purpose of his life, at the ap-

pointed hour he lifted his white head before his foes. After some degree of counter-speech, the old man waxed exceeding wroth against the "priests of Baal;" and, as D'Aubigné says, so bore down upon them with a rush of inspired eloquence, that they sat in listening silence. He concluded an impassioned address with these words:—"Do with me what you will, I care not; but the doctrines of this Gospel can never perish. **THE TRUTH MUST PREVAIL!**" He turned to leave the court. No single voice was heard in opposition. Like his Divine Master among the men of Nazareth, no man laid hands on him, and he, passing through the midst of them for the fourth time, safely went his way.

Wycliffe was seated in his lecture-room, engaged in the dearest work of his life, the exposition of God's Word, when the officers of the University came in and loudly read the stern decree of the chancellor and his council, endorsed by letters from the king. At first our reformer seemed to be confused, the gag was administered so suddenly. But speedily regaining his self-command, he

sturdily insisted on finishing his lecture, and then declaring that "Neither shall chancellor nor any other have power to change my belief," he expressed publicly his intention of appealing to the king.

This was in itself an innovation. To appeal to the king or to any secular authority on a matter pertaining only to the Church, was to break through the usage of centuries, and in itself exposed the appellant to the loudest thunders and most scathing lightnings of the Seven Hills. Wycliffe and his friends proceeded to consult his patron and supporter, John of Gaunt. That haughty and impulsive prince, however, was losing influence both in the country and at court. Probably he was not inclined to quarrel with the Church on mere doctrinal matters. Be that as it may, Gaunt advised him to submit to the authorities. That Wycliffe would not, could not do, and so he was left to struggle through the storm alone.

For a time he seems to have defied his enemies. His doctrines were growing popular among the secular clergy, and he himself

had strong support in the University itself. Vice-Chancellor Barton and his councillors were dislodged from their position; and for a while it seemed not unlikely that Wycliffe might be reinstated; and certainly his doctrines received a greater impetus than ever. In the end, however, Wycliffe was compelled to leave Oxford, and the archbishop had the satisfaction of knowing that the doors of the University would never more be darkened by the form of the arch-heretic who had wrought the Church such dire and lasting harm.

It is a very convincing testimony to the strong hold which Wycliffe had gotten on the people, that with all his malignity Courtenay did not dare to thrust out so much as a finger against his person. An invisible guard surrounded him, like the angel charioteers that hemmed in the prophet Elisha. He was revered and honoured exceedingly. His name was a household word by many and many an English hearth; and the Church, although she thirsted for his blood, forbore to lay her iron hand upon him, aware that many a lance would be couched and many a sword would leap from

its scabbard to defend the foremost patriot of his day.

Aided by the crown, Courtenay's triumph seemed complete. Religious freedom was suppressed at Oxford, and with its death all trace of intellectual life as suddenly disappears. When Wycliffe departed, the olden darkness returned to it. Those who loved darkness rather than light, greeted his departure to Lutterworth with undisguised delight. If they could have seen the result, however, they would probably have left him in possession of his professor's chair. His painful expulsion from the scene of his noble labours enabled him to revise, complete, and publish the first English Bible, that final blow of his good broadsword which gave to Popery its deadliest wound, and gave to his name a glory and an honour that can never die!

"The truth must prevail!" were his last words spoken before any papal tribunal. The brave old watcher for the dawn had held his own through all the wild night of storm and darkness; now he proclaims the morning, and flashes over England the open book!

"With bonds and scorn and evil will
The world requites its prophets still.
Sport of the changeful multitude,
Nor calmly heard nor understood,
Yet will the seer be brave of heart,
For God's great purpose set apart.
Before his far-discerning eyes
The future as the present lies.
Beyond a narrow-bounded age
Stretches the prophet-heritage,
Through heaven's dim spaces angel trod,
Through arches round the throne of God.
Thy audience, worlds! All time to be
The witness of the truth in thee."

CHAPTER XIX.

TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.

It may be claimed for John Wycliffe that he was the first writer of religious tracts, and that he was the practical pioneer of that great Society which has done and is doing so much good service in the spread of cheap religious teaching in modern times.

In that age of ponderous tomes and parchments, of dry, elaborate, and all but endless disquisitions, such as could neither be obtained nor understood by the common people, our great reformer found out a more excellent way. He was bent upon the enlightenment of the people, and so he took to scattering the immortal seed in a handy form, in simple speech, the common dialect of the market, the farm, and the village green. He cut his parchment into strips; on these he wrote short

postils or sermonettes, brief sententious tracts, containing gospel messages simply told.

As the popular gospel doctor and teacher at Oxford, he had the pens of many ready writers at his disposal—youthful students who sat at his feet, learned Lollards of riper years, who, having found the truth that made them free, were willing workers in freedom's holy cause. As these telling little fly-sheets were multiplied in number, the poor priests, the itinerant evangelists, scattered them through all the land; and Knighton, the angry chronicler before quoted, complains that this pestilent heresy "budded under his pen like leaves in spring-time." That Sir Priest little thought how true and beautiful his metaphor was, for they were indeed leaves from the tree of life which were for the healing of the nation.

His departure from Oxford and the comparative repose of Lutterworth, enabled him even to a greater extent than in his college chambers to produce these powerful pamphlets for the people. He wisely turned away from king and noble, from pope and prelate, from priest and schoolman, resolved to place the

light of divine truth, freed from all veil and covering, in the honest keeping of the common people. He was rapidly approaching his sixtieth year, and sickness and the results of storm and persecution had sorely shaken his failing frame, yet at Lutterworth he seems to be possessed of even more of the eagle spirit than before. He knew that his end was near; he had a warning stroke of severe illness at Oxford; besides, he knew that he was never safe from a fresh onslaught of prelatie enmity, and from occasional sentences in his writings it is clear that he was prepared for and even expected a martyr's death. He felt that faggot and stake in London or a dungeon under the Seven Hills was his likeliest fate. He writes, "Oh that God would give me a docile heart, persevering steadfastness, and love to Christ, to His Church, and to the members of the devil who are butchering the Church of Christ, that I might out of pure love encounter and lay hold upon them. What a glorious cause for me to give up the present miserable life for! For this same was the cause of the martyr-death of Christ Influenced and actuated by such burn-

ing charity as this, he laboured now with an energy that almost surpasses belief. "With amazing industry," says Mr. Green, he "issued tract after tract, appealing boldly and avowedly to the whole people of England, and by a transition that marks the wonderful genius of the man, the schoolman was transformed into the pamphleteer." The rough, clear, homely English of his tracts, in the speech of the ploughman and the trader of the day; the terse, vehement sentences, the stinging sarcasms, the hard antitheses roused the dullest minds like a whip; and the first results of Barton's despotic decree were to give an impetus to Wycliffe's doctrines such as they had never had before.

In many of these broadsheets he unmasks the character and unfolds the false pretensions and corrupt doctrines of the priesthood; he encourages the humble reader in the exercise of the understanding God has given him, and, enlightened by the Scriptures, to meet them like a free, Christian man. In this potent fashion he sought to detach them from their false guides, that he might lead them to the one Saviour of their souls.

On the whole, however, one turns to those tracts of his, of which there are many, which are designed to help a lowly Christian to lead a trustful and godly life. These are gracious little treatises, full of marrow and of wines on the lees well refined. Being so exceedingly brief, they could be written out and scattered without limit; and we can imagine with how warm a welcome they would be received by hungry souls in farm, and grange, and village, who were waiting for the weekly or monthly visit of the "poor priest" who was bringing for them these sweet crumbs of the bread of life. In reading these tracts, one wonders that they have not been modernised and sown broadcast; we sit at the feet of Wycliffe with true reverence, and think of this royal ambassador, this friend of princes, the most eminent scholar of his time, teaching the neglected and degraded poor with such sweet simplicity, such fervent love and care. A few specimens must suffice:—

"To any degree of true love to Jesus, no soul can attain unless he be truly meek. For a proud soul seeks to have his own will,

and so he shall never come to any degree of God's love. Ever the lower that a soul sitteth in the valley of meekness, so many the more streams of grace and love come thereto. And if the soul be high in the hills of pride, the wind of the tempter bloweth away all manner of grace therefrom."

"Singular love is when all solace and comfort is closed out of the heart but the love of Jesus alone. Other delight or other joy pleases not; for the sweetness of Him is so comforting and lasting, His love is so burning and gladdening, that he who is in this degree may well feel the fire of love burning in his soul. That fire is so pleasant that no man can tell but he that feeleth it, and not fully he. Then the soul is Jesus loving, on Jesus thinking, and Jesus desiring, only burning in coveting of Him; singing in Him, resting on Him. Then the thought turns to song and melody."

"God playeth with His child when He suffereth him to be tempted; as a mother rises from her much-beloved child, and hides herself, and leaves him alone, and suffers him to cry Mother, mother, so that he looks about,

cries and weeps for a time, and at last, when the child is ready to be overset with troubles and weeping, she comes again, clasps him in her arms, kisses him, and wipes away his tears. So our Lord suffereth His loved child to be tempted and troubled for a time, and withdraweth some of His solace and full protection, to see what His child will do; and when he is about to be overcome by temptations, then He defendeth him, and comforteth him by His grace."

At this distance of time we are little able to understand how precious and profitable were these "aids to the anxious inquirer," these soothing and solacing messages of grace, to those whose lot was cast in those days of spiritual famine, of dearth of the saving word of the Lord. They were the daily text-books of piety to the tried and troubled Church of Christ in England for more than a hundred years, and assisted to a far greater extent than we can measure in moulding its opinions and character, and in making ready for the brighter and happier times that followed a people prepared of the Lord. In the dark and dreary

aftertime that intervened between Wycliffe's day and the days of Tyndale, Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, that weary while of persecution and patient endurance, Wycliffe's tracts, together with the writings of his Lollard priests, had oftentimes the honour of being cast as pestilent heresy into the flame, and of mingling with the ashes of the martyr on whose faithful breast they had been hung as a token and mark of shame. One hundred and fifty years of stern repression and rigorous proscription, so far from destroying these immortal pages, only served to multiply and spread them abroad, so that when there came to England the dawn of a freer and a brighter day, John Wycliffe's writings were easily collected in their entirety, and we may well hope that under the auspices of the "Wycliffe Society," recently established, these "Tracts for the Times," of five hundred years ago, which are also Tracts for the Times in which we live, will again be made public. British Protestants will find in them a tonic well calculated to brace up their fidelity to Protestant principles, and nerve them to an adequate

fulfilment of their responsibilities as the custodians of religious liberty and light. Had the Church of Christ in England during these latter generations been made fully conversant with the marvellous outflow of Wycliffe's tongue and pen, she would have ranked him amongst the very foremost of her instructors, and given him his due position as a leader and commander to the people, one of the very best and bravest among all the defenders of the faith. He trod the path of duty with a firm and faithful step. Though it led him through thorn and briar, his bleeding feet neither paused nor faltered, for to him the path of duty was the way to glory.

“ He who walks it, only thirsting
For the right, and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes
Shall find the stubborn thistles bursting
Into glossy purples, which out-redden
All voluptuous garden roses.
He that ever following her commands,—
On, with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Through the long gorge to the far light, hath won
His path upward and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of duty, scaled,
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun !”

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIRST ENGLISH BIBLE.

FOR some time the enemies of Wycliffe seem to have contented themselves with his banishment from the University; but in his retirement at Lutterworth, as well as in the stormy years that preceded it, "he was forging the great weapon which, wielded by other hands than his own, was to produce such a terrible effect on the triumphant hierarchy." While he was thus engaged, he was summoned to Rome to answer for his many and grievous heresies before St. Peter's chair. Two rival popes still held divided rule over the one and indivisible Church. In replying to the summons, our reformer declined to take the journey, owing to failing health. But he gives his Holiness, Pope Urban, some very sound if not very

palatable advice. He assures the Pope that his claim to supremacy, as well as that of his rival Clement, had no rational or scriptural basis; "for," says he, "Christ Jesus is the only true Head of the Church." He declared that his only reason for not going to Rome was his inability to travel.

"I am always glad," so ran his stingingly sarcastic answer to the bull that summoned him, "to explain my faith to any one, and above all to the Bishop of Rome; for I take it for granted that if it be orthodox, he will confirm it; if it be erroneous, he will correct it. I assume, too, that as chief Vicar of Christ upon earth, the Bishop of Rome is of all mortal men most bound to the law of Christ's gospel; for among the disciples of Christ a majority is not reckoned by simply counting heads in the fashion of this world, but according to the imitation of Christ on either side. Now Christ, during His life upon earth, was of all men the poorest, casting from Him all worldly authority. *I deduce from these premises, as a simple counsel of my own, that the Pope should surrender all temporal authority*

to the civil power, and advise his clergy to do the same !”

For some years, as may easily be gathered from his writings, Wycliffe had entertained the idea of giving to his country a translation of the entire Scriptures into the vernacular, and there is evidence that, with the assistance of several Lollard scholars, the work had been more or less progressing for some time. It is easy to see that his love and reverence for the Book, and his loyal fidelity to it as the only rule of life, increased and strengthened with his years. His appeal was ever “to the law and to the testimony.” “Whoever speaks not according to this word, yea, if it be the Pope in council, there is no light in him.” “The will of God,” says he, “is evidently revealed in two Testaments. The law of Jesus Christ is sufficient to rule the Church, and any disputation not originally produced from thence must be accounted profane.” “There is no court besides the court of heaven, and though there were a hundred popes, and all the friars in the world were turned into cardinals, yet should we learn more from the gospel than

from all that multitude." "No doubt, as our Lord Jesus Christ saith, and His apostles profess plainly, antichrist and his cursed disciples should come and deceive many men by hypocrisy and tyranny, and the best armour of Christian men against this cursed chieftain and his host is the text of holy writ. Christ Jesus, for Thine endless power, mercy, and charity, make Thy blessed law known and kept of thy people!" "As the faith of the Church is contained in the Scriptures, the more these are known in their true meaning the better." With these views, we do not wonder, knowing as we know that duty-doing, at however great a cost, was the law of Wycliffe's life, that the brave reformer determined to give the English people an English Bible!

All the other labours of this Hercules, and they were many, were like the slaying of Hydra with its thousand heads; this was the bringing of the golden apple from the garden of Hesperides, of which whosoever tasted was endowed with the divine. Detached portions of the Word of God had been translated before

by the Venerable Bede, by the immortal Alfred, and by others. The time had now come for a whole English Bible, and John Wycliffe gave this country the precious boon. The ebbing strength of our reformer was expended here. The forge of the old rectory study must have glowed day and night as, assisted by John Purvey, Nicholas of Hereford, and other Lollard friends and followers, he moulded his noble legacy. With marvellous and untiring diligence he shaped the grand Excalibur, keener blade than ever hung at Arthur's belt—the blade which was to cut a nation's way out of darkness into daylight, out of bondage into freedom; and then like a flaming sword turning every way, was to guard the liberty which its own keen edge had won!

Rolled up in that illuminated parchment lay folded, like the giant oak in the green cup of an acorn, all the future developments of the English race. What an epoch that was in the history of the world! The expanding circles made by the smooth stone which John Wycliffe then flung into the waters of humanity have touched the furthest shores of heathendom

and sent a vital vibration round the world. Within those wooden boards and brazen clasps the English Reformation lay hidden—lay hidden in the volume that lies on the table in the Lutterworth parsonage, for that volume is the first English Bible that ever saw the sun! It was the first crush of the grape, and its strength and aroma continue to this day. Thanks! weary, worn-out toiler, thanks! It is a right royal gift. Thanks! bold pioneer of a better time. England will not forget thee. Thy name is carven high upon the tablets of her history; and a grateful nation will keep thy memory green!

It may be interesting to transcribe four verses from the second chapter in the Gospel of Matthew as an example of Wycliffe's work and an illustration of the condition of the English language five hundred years ago:—

“Therefore when Jhesus was born in Bethlem of Juda, in the days of kyng Herode, loo! kingis or wijs men, camen fro the eest to Jerusalem, sayinge, Wher is he, that is borun kyng of Jewis? forsothe we han seyn his sterre in the este, and we comen for to wirshipe

hym. Sothely kyng herynge is trublid, and al Jerusalem with him. And he, gedrynge to gidre alle the princis of prestis and scribis of the peple, enquiride of hem wher Crist shulde be borun."

It is impossible to describe the wrath of the prelates and of the religious orders at the appearance of the Scriptures in the English tongue. Sir Richard Knighton, writing concerning the fall of this tremendous thunderbolt into the Romish camp, delivers his soul in this fashion:—

"The gospel, which Christ committed to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might sweetly dispense it to the laity, according to the exigencies of the times and the wants of men, this Master John Wycliffe has translated into the Anglic (not angelic) tongue,"—that is his small sneer at the rude speech of the common people,—“thereby making it more open and common to the laity, and to women who can read, than formerly it was to the best instructed of the clergy. And thus the gospel pearl is cast forth, and is trodden under foot of swine,

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and what was once revered by clergy and laity is become, as it were, the common jest of both; and the jewel of the clergy, their peculiar treasure, is made for ever common to the laity."

It is a very sad complaint of the priestly chronicler; but that touch about "sweetly dispensing" the gospel to the laity cannot fail to raise a smile, and the ingenuous confession concerning "the best instructed of the clergy" contains much food for thought. Wycliffe's translation of the Bible was soon spread abroad. Not only had the spread of his doctrines raised an almost universal demand for it, but in the order of the "poor priests" he had an agency at hand well adapted for its rapid dispersal among the common people. The itinerant preachers whom he had sent out to proclaim glad tidings to the poor, and who were travelling through every part of England, became now a band of colporteurs for the dissemination of the Word of God. They knew in what far-off hamlets pious souls were counting the days till the missionary should return, and pining for the

bread of life. They knew of many thinking merchants and tradesmen in great towns, many honourable men and women among the country gentry who were eager to search the Scriptures, and they were glad to supply their need.

A large number of copyists were employed to multiply each portion of the translation as it was completed; and as fast as a few psalms, chapters, or a book were completed, the priceless treasures were taken to the homes of the people. It is easy to conjure up such scenes—rustic groups by the wayside, in the churchyard, or around the turf fire in the evening, listening while one more scholarly than his neighbours read to them the Bible in their mother tongue! No doubt the precious manuscript would be handed round to be admired and wondered at, and not seldom to be wet with tears at the sight of the name of Jesus in their daily dialect.

And so it came to pass that the Word of Life, that sacred and vital stream, forced its way, despite all barriers, through all ranks and classes of society. Thousands upon thousands

of English men and women drank of the forbidden waters, and rejoiced exceedingly. There came again dark days to England; or rather there fell upon it a night of ignorance, of priestly tyranny, of superstition, and social disorder of the saddest kind. But the followers of John Wycliffe were never extinct; the Book which John Wycliffe had scattered abroad never perished amid all the storm of blood and fire! Driven from the higher classes, the gospel of truth had taken refuge among the poor and lowly, and among these was nurtured and preserved, silently preparing the ground for its triumph in the after days. The light which Wycliffe kindled when he gave his native land the Bible, though often beaten down, smothered, hidden from public view, was never for an instant extinguished, and at length it blazed up high, quenchless, an inextinguishable beacon-light in the English Reformation! For a century and a half this pioneer Bible was the well-spring of the religious life of England; and if it were for no other work than this, John Foxes' eloquent eulogy of Wycliffe would be

true every whit:—"This is out of all doubt, that at what time all the world was in most desperate and vile estate, and that the lamentable ignorance and darkness of God's truth had overshadowed the whole earth, this man stepped out like a valiant champion, unto whom may justly be applied that is spoken in the Book of Ecclesiasticus of one Simon the son of Onias: 'Even as the morning star being in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon being full in her course, and as the bright beams of the sun, so doth he shine and glister in the temple and Church of God.'"

“Not vainly did old poets tell,
Nor vainly did old genius paint,
God's great and crowning miracle,
The hero and the saint.

In vain shall Rome her portals bar,
And shut from him her saintly prize,
Whom, in the world's great calendar,
All men shall canonize.

God blesses still the generous thought,
And still the fitting word He speeds;
And truth, at His requiring taught,
He quickens into deeds.

And thus the common tongue and pen
Which, world-wide, echo 'Wycliffe's' fame

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

As one of heaven's anointed men,
Have sanctified his name.

Where is the victory o'er the grave?
What dust upon the spirit lies?
God keeps the sacred life He gave—
The prophet never dies."

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO SCENES AT LUTTERWORTH.

WHEN the great reformer had perfected his translation of the Scriptures into the common language of the people, and had thus conferred on England his crowning boon, his work was done. Until this last great legacy of love was in the hands of the nation, and safely assured to them for ever, it seemed impossible that Wycliffe should die. All that papal wrath and priestly malice could do to take his life had been attempted again and again. But for ever the prey was snatched from the hand of the fowler, until his mission was perfected and his life-work crowned with its greatest deed. Then the summons came. The Master said, "It is enough; come up higher," and at once he entered his reward.

He had already had a premonitory intima-

tion of his approaching end at Oxford, some two years before the fatal stroke that gave him his promotion. One peaceful Sabbath morning, the 29th of December 1384, he was seated within the communion in Lutterworth Church, while his curate, companion, and friend, John Horn, was conducting the service of the Lord's Supper. The old man was suddenly smitten with paralysis, and sank down upon the floor. Borne to his house by loving hands and amid the tears and sighs of his beloved flock, he lay for a few brief hours unconscious, speechless, on the uttermost borderland of life, and then he peacefully passed away, to partake of that communion where Christ Himself breaks the bread and lifts to sainted lips the wine of everlasting life!

So died John Wycliffe. It was an unexpected but glorious conclusion to his long and splendid life. "Strange," says quaint old Fuller, "that a hare hunted so many times and by so many packs of hounds should die quietly seated on his form at last." Thus peacefully closed a life of storm and war. His sun set in a calm sky; or rather this star, this

herald star of the Reformation, having fulfilled its mission, and guided with ten thousand beams of light a whole nation to Bethlehem and the Christ, sank behind the west, and left a mellow glory which shines along the Church's annals and history to this day!

When his enemies could work him no more harm, they bestowed an epitaph on their indomitable opponent. "He was," says one, "the devil's instrument, the people's confusion, the heretic's idol, hypocrite's mirror, schism's broacher, hatred's sower, lie's forger, flattery's sink, who at his death despaired like Cain, and, stricken by the terrible judgments of God, breathed forth his wicked soul into the dark mansions of the black devil!" This may be taken as a sufficient indication of the ferocious hate entertained towards him by those whose craft he had endangered, whose claims he had repelled, whose hold upon the people he had so greatly loosed that they could never again be permanently enslaved in the bonds of superstition.

Enough has been said in this brief sketch to show that John Wycliffe was the Daniel of

his era. He dared to be singular when singularity was a heinous crime, and to exasperate the most terrible, the most revengeful power upon earth. He spent his life in defence of the truth of God; in crushing out the false; in preaching a free gospel of Jesus Christ; in securing liberty of conscience, freedom of thought and speech, and an open Bible for the English people. When his work was done, there was no enforced pause in the labour of his noble life; no compulsory rusting of the bright, clean, keen blade, whose blows were trenchant to the last; he died upon the sacred floor, surrounded by the sacred symbols which he had defended from the blasphemies of Rome, and having fought a good fight, and finished his course, he bequeathed a noble legacy to England, and slept the sleep of death.

And not in England alone was this great man's influence confined. The effect of his marvellous work extended to other lands, and there, as here, they were as the axe laid at the root of the tree to the prevailing errors of the age. Queen Anne of Bohemia, who had married

Richard II., was good and pious, and had warm sympathy with the reformer's views. Through her influence Wycliffe's writings were carried to her native land; they received favour from the reigning monarch of that country; they formed a constant topic for discussion in the University of Prague, and were accepted with avidity by the common people. It says much for their effect that in the year 1400 the Holy Scriptures were translated in the Bohemian tongue.

The famous martyr John Huss became a convert to Wycliffe's doctrine, and lighted his bright torch of truth from Wycliffe's brightly burning lamp. In 1409 the Pope found it necessary to issue a bull demanding the suppression of Wycliffe's writings through all Europe, and that the pestilent heretic Huss should be sent to Rome. But Prague had got somewhat of Wycliffe's spirit as well as his speech, and its answer to the Pope was—No! Then to the front came Jerome of Prague, who became a leader in the grand crusade against Rome, surpassing Huss in the fervency of his spirit and the trenchant nature of his blows.

At last things came to such a pass ; the new heresy assumed such alarming proportions that the Council of Constance was called. It was an imposing gathering. The Emperor of Germany, twenty princes, 140 counts, a pope, more than twenty cardinals, seven patriarchs, twenty archbishops, ninety-one bishops, six hundred other prelates, and about four thousand priests met in that greatest and grandest of all European conclaves, to crush the work of Wycliffe and stem the rising tide of liberty whose flood-gates he had opened wide. As the result of their deliberations John Huss and Jerome of Prague were both burnt at the stake, and the roll of martyrs received two of its noblest names. John Wycliffe was solemnly declared to be the primal author of all the mischief, the lever in the hands of the devil which was turning the world upside down. Thousands of copies of his writings were collected and committed to the flames, and all the curses that Rome could fulminate were uttered against those who should have and hold, read or spread the like.

But they could not treat Wycliffe as they had dealt with his two disciples. With what joy would they have fastened the arch offender to the stake and offered him up as a living sacrifice to the offended honour of the papal throne! But he had been dead for many a year. Still his body had not yet mingled again with mother earth, and so they sentenced *it!* It was to be torn from its narrow bed in Lutterworth churchyard, and was to be solemnly burnt to ashes as an expression of abhorrence of his heresies, and a token of the eternal damnation of fire to which his apostate soul was doomed!

For more than forty years the daisies had bloomed upon the graves of Lutterworth, and the name of Wycliffe had become a household word to stir up the souls of men. Then a strange sight was seen in the country churchyard. The villagers gather round a band of priests and servitors, with an archbishop at their head, as they break into the reformer's tomb and, amid jests and laughter, drag his coffin into the light of day. It is borne down the meadow-slopes to the bridge that crosses a little rivulet called the Swift; a fire is

kindled, and the mouldering relics of the grand old apostle of England are consumed!

The smoke of that strange burning upon Lutterworth bridge went up and darkened all the land, like the opening of an Apocalyptic seal of doom, and prophesied a terrible retribution upon the actors in that coarse and useless crime. The bursting of that sepulchral stone became a resurrection for the truth which Wycliffe preached, which spread from Bohemia right through Europe until Luther's torch was kindled by it; then the fire that burnt the bones of Wycliffe was answered by the cheerful blaze outside the gate of Wittemburg when Luther flung the Pope's bull into the flames in the face of all Christendom!

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,
The eternal life of God is hers;
But error wounded writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers."

When the vain and foolish deed was done, then, amid the tears and silent indignation of the people—grey-haired sires who had first heard the gospel from the old rector's lips, and bearded men on whose childish curls he had laid his hands—the ashes were cast into

the brook that flowed hard by. Says Thomas Fuller, in one of the quaintest conceits that were ever penned, "The brook bore them to the Avon, the Avon bore them to the Severn, the Severn bore them to the narrow seas, and the narrow seas into the main ocean; and thus the ashes of John Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed the wide world over."

"Such was he ; his work is done ;
But while the races of mankind endure,
Let his great example stand,
Colossal, seen in every land.
A noble life, a nature pure,
Tell in all lands and all human story
The path of duty be the way to glory ;
And let the land whose hearths he saved from shame,
For many and many an age proclaim—
Honour, honour, honour to him !
Eternal honour to his name !"

CHAPTER XXII.

THOUGHTS FOR THE TIMES.

AND now, after the lapse of full five hundred years, as we celebrate the quincentennial anniversary of John Wycliffe's death, what are the lessons which may well be drawn from his life-history suitable to the times in which we live? Surely such a celebration should quicken and intensify our gratitude to the God he served so faithfully, and to the man himself for the services which he rendered to the cause of religious light and freedom, and to the best interests of his native land.

As we look back upon the worse than Egyptian darkness, the grinding bondage, the mental night, the moral degradation, the social misery, the wretched inequalities, the spiritual famine, the ruthless tyranny of the papal age, we shall surely say with grateful hearts, Thank

God for a better and brighter day. As we turn to look upon our higher civilisation, our happier lot, our social comforts, our progressive knowledge, our political freedom, our moral sunshine, our religious liberty, our open Bible, our unfettered press, our free sanctuary worship, our educational facilities, our precious heritage of truth, and all the franchises that truth brings in its train, we thank God for these noble and daring souls ; souls who served and suffered, laboured, lived, and died to break our fetters, lift off each incubus, to kindle the light in which we bask ; and reverently honour the names and memories of the men who, in the face of hottest persecution, malice, and contumely, so grandly served our country and our God !

We can scarcely study the life-story of this great hero, too, without thinking with deepening sorrow, anxiety, and shame of the treason in our midst—a treason which speaks scoffingly and slanderously of the men who bore the brunt of the battle, led the forlorn hope, scaled the ramparts of ecclesiastical despotism, overturned the walls, and on the ruins, amid a

murderous hail of shot and shell, planted the banners of freedom and of truth. We shall note with foreboding and distress of mind that the cloven foot of priestcraft hath entered Protestant sanctuaries, and that papal blasphemy, papal ritual, papal doctrine, papal practices are rife in so-called Protestant pulpits, desks, and choirs. We shall be righteously angry as we remember that many of the so-called official and established holders of the key of knowledge acquit them of their charge so loosely, and that so many are altogether traitors to their trust; that the landmarks of our national faith are being rudely assailed by their professed defenders; and that olden errors, which once held this land in bondage, despots over the medieval mind, are again lifting up their evil heads in the very places where, above all others, they ought to be trampled beneath the heel.

A candid consideration of John Wycliffe's life-struggle with the Papacy will surely lead us to ponder on the progress made by Romanism in its more legitimate shape; on the serious advances she is again making towards

power and position on English soil, her feet shod with the wool of silence, and her ultimate purpose veiled under a policy of peace. Popery, waning in other lands before the advancing light of civilisation and the unshackled steps of free thought, is gathering its energies, furbishing its weapons, and ripening its plans for the re-establishment of England in the bonds of priestcraft and the galling fetters of a dominant ecclesiasticism, and she is even now heard occasionally to boast, through the lips of her leaders, that her feet are once more on the steps of her ancient throne. Thirty years ago, we are told, the number of Romish priests in England might be counted by hundreds, to-day they may be summed by thousands. Then conventual establishments, it is said, numbered scarce threescore, now these are to be counted by hundreds too. To-day the Papacy has a diligent and pertinacious propaganda at work in every direction, from the palace to the workhouse, and from the university to the charity school, and through all the fields of England this enemy soweth tares!

Surely no lover of gospel light and liberty can read the record of this noble life and heroic conflict, too, without mourning over the sad lassitude and culpable indifference with which all this is regarded by the Protestant Churches of this kingdom. A criminal and self-destructive unconcern seems to have fallen, like a deep sleep, on the Protestant soul of the people, so that the silent tide is creeping back upon us with music in its ripple and death in its embrace! A spurious liberalism is far too prevalent, a baseless optimism which too readily forgets that the Papacy is unaltered and unalterable. On her banner is the proud motto "*Semper eadem*," and her very nature is a despotism that knows no change.

And lastly, this quincenary celebration should rouse the Churches to a full appreciation of their responsibilities before God and the nation as the guardians and custodians of the open Bible, the right of private judgment, liberty of conscience, and of the faith once delivered to the saints. Surely we who have so grand a heritage to guard, so glorious an ances-

try to honour, so divine a treasure to defend, so high a mission to fulfil, will be staunch and true to the best interests of our country, to the call of duty, and the command of God.

Every sign of the times seems to point to the renewal of a vital struggle with error. Another crisis is coming on us. The Man-child of the Apocalyptic vision will again have to do deadly battle with antichrist in its twofold shape of popery and infidelity. Let every loyal soul, loyal to Christ, to the equal rights of man, to the Bible, that charter of our freedom, that bulwark of our nation, that one hope of the world, gather round and uphold the old Protestant banner. It has been torn in many a rude engagement; it is largely stained with the blood of its defenders; but the old motto is still emblazoned on it so clearly that he who runs may read:—

“The cross, not the crucifix; a preached gospel, not a priesthood; a finished atonement, not the mass; loyalty to Jesus, not obedience to the Pope; an open Bible, not tradition; salvation by faith, not penance and absolution; truth and freedom, and never more the

fetters of priestcraft, and the despot rule of Rome !”

“ In times when evil fortune
 Assailed our country's cause,
 Our fathers rallied round the truth,
 Defenders of her laws ;
 And round the throne and altar,
 And home's sweet sheltering tree,
 Thus did of old our gallant sires,
 And so, true hearts, will we.

We want no triumphs sprung from force,
 They stain the noblest cause ;
 'Tis not in blood, you know, that truth
 Inscribes her perfect laws.
 Our spears and swords are printed words,
 The mind our battle-plain ;
 We've won such victories before,
 And so we can again !

This makes us stand the foremost
 Among the brave and free ;
 Thus did of old our gallant sires,
 And so, true hearts, will we !”

THE END.

