

The History of Protestantism

by the
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Book Second

Wicliffe and His Times, or Advent of Protestantism

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Chapter I.

Wicliffe: His Birth and Education.

The Principle and the Rite—Rapid Growth of the One—Slow Progress and ultimate Triumph of the Other—England—Wicliffe—His Birthplace—His Education—Goes to Oxford—Enters Merton College—Its Fame—The Evangelical Bradwardine—His Renown—Pioneers the Way for Wicliffe—The Philosophy of those Days—Wicliffe's Eminence as a Scholastic—Studies also the Canon and Civil Laws—His Conversion—Theological Studies—The Black Death—Ravages Greece, Italy, &c.—Enters England—Its awful Desolations—Its Impression on Wicliffe—Stands Face to Face with Eternal Death—Taught not to Fear the Death of the Body.

With the revolving centuries we behold the world slowly entering into the light. The fifth century brought with it a signal blessing to Christianity in the guise of a disaster. Like a tree that was growing too rapidly, it was cut down to its roots that it might escape a luxuriance which would have been its ruin. From a Principle that has its seat in the heart, and the fruit of which is an enlightened understanding and a holy life, Religion, under the corrupting influences of power and riches, was being transformed into a Rite, which, having its sphere solely in the senses, leaves the soul in darkness and the life in bondage.

These two, the Principle and the Rite, began so early as the fourth and fifth centuries to draw apart, and to develop each after its own kind. The rite rapidly progressed, and seemed far to outstrip its rival. It built for itself gorgeous temples, it enlisted in its service a powerful hierarchy, it added year by year to the number and magnificence of its ceremonies, it expressed itself in canons and constitutions; and, seduced by this imposing show, nations bowed down before it, and puissant kings lent their swords for its defence and propagation.

Far otherwise was it with its rival. Withdrawing into the spiritual sphere, it appeared to have abandoned the field to its antagonist. Not so, however. If it had hidden itself from the eyes of men, it was that it might build up from the very foundation, piling truth upon truth, and prepare in silence those mighty spiritual forces by which it was in due time to emancipate the world. Its progress was consequently less marked, but was far more real than that of its antagonist. Every error which the one pressed into its service was a cause of weakness; every truth which the other added to its creed was a source of strength. The uninstructed and superstitious hordes which the one received into its communion were dangerous allies. They might follow it in the day of its prosperity, but they would desert it and become its foes whenever the tide of popular favour turned against it. Not so the adherents of the other. With purified hearts and enlightened understandings, they were

prepared to follow it at all hazards. The number of its disciples, small at first, continually multiplied. The purity of their lives, the meekness with which they bore the injuries inflicted on them, and the heroism with which their death was endured, augmented from age to age the moral power and the spiritual glory of their cause. And thus, while the one reached its fall through its very success, the other marched on through oppression and proscription to triumph.

We have arrived at the beginning of the fourteenth century. We have had no occasion hitherto to speak of the British Isles, but now our attention must be turned to them. Here a greater light is about to appear than any that had illumined the darkness of the ages that had gone before.

In the North Riding of Yorkshire, watered by the Tees, lies the parish of Wicliffe. In the manor-house of this parish, in the year 1324,¹ was born a child, who was named John. Here his ancestors had lived since the time of the Conquest, and, according to the manner of the times, they took their surname from the place of their residence. and the son now born to them was known as John de Wicliffe. Of his boyhood nothing is recorded. He was destined from an early age for the Church, which gives us ground to conclude that even then he discovered that penetrating intelligence which marked his maturer years, and that loving sympathy which drew him so often in after life to the homesteads and the sick-beds of his parish of Lutterworth. Schools for rudimental instruction were even then pretty thickly planted over England, in connection with the cathedral towns and the religious houses; and it is probable that the young Wicliffe received his first training at one of these seminaries in his own neighborhood.²

At the age of sixteen or thereabouts, Wicliffe was sent to Oxford. Here he became first a scholar, and next a fellow of Merton College, the oldest foundation save one in Oxford.³ The youth of England, athirst for knowledge, the fountains of which had long been sealed up, were then crowding to the universities, and when Wicliffe entered Merton there were not fewer than 30,000 students at Oxford. These numbers awaken surprise, but it is to be taken into account that many of the halls were no better than upper schools. The college which Wicliffe joined was the most distinguished at that seat of learning. The fame, unrivalled in their own day, which two of its scholars, William Occam and Duns Scotus, had attained, shed a lustre upon it. One of its chairs had been filled by the celebrated Bradwardine,⁴ who was closing his career at Merton about the time that the young Wicliffe was opening his in Oxford. Bradwardine was one of the first mathematicians and astronomers of his day; but having been drawn to the study of the Word of God, he embraced the doctrines of free grace, and his chair became a fountain of higher knowledge than that of natural science. While most of his contemporaries, by the aid of a subtle

¹ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 1; Oxford ed., 1820.

² Lechler thinks that "probably it was the pastor of the same-named village who was his first teacher." (*Johann von Wiclif, und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*, vol. i., p. 271; Leipzig, 1873.)

³ Of the twenty and more colleges that now constitute Oxford University, only five then existed, viz.—Merton (1274), Balliol (1260-82), Exeter (1314), Oriel (1324), and University College (1332). These foundations were originally intended for the support of poor scholars, who were under the rule of a superior, and received both board and instruction.

⁴ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 2.

scholasticism, were endeavouring to penetrate into the essence of things, and to explain all mysteries, Bradwardine was content to accept what God had revealed in his Word, and this humility was rewarded by his finding the path which others missed. Lifting the veil, he unfolded to his students, who crowded round him with eager attention and admiring reverence, the way of life, warning them especially against that Pelagianism which was rapidly substituting a worship of externals for a religion of the heart, and teaching men to trust in their power of will for a salvation which can come only from the sovereign grace of God. Bradwardine was greater as a theologian than he had been as a philosopher. The fame of his lectures filled Europe, and his evangelical views, diffused by his scholars, helped to prepare the way for Wicliffe and others who were to come after him. It was around his chair that the new day was seen first to break.

A quick apprehension, a penetrating intellect, and a retentive memory, enabled the young scholar of Merton to make rapid progress in the learning of those days. Philosophy then lay in guesses rather than in facts. Whatever could be known from having been put before man in the facts of Nature or the doctrines of Revelation, was deemed not worth further investigation. It was too humble an occupation to observe and to deduce. In the pride of his genius, man turned away from a field lying at his feet, and plunged boldly into a region where, having no data to guide him and no ground for solid footing, he could learn really nothing. From this region of vague speculation the explorer brought back only the images of his own creating, and, dressing up these fancies as facts, he passed them off as knowledge.

Such was the philosophy that invited the study of Wicliffe.⁵ There was scarce enough in it to reward his labour, but he thirsted for knowledge, and giving himself to it “with his might,” he soon became a master in the scholastic philosophy, and did not fear to encounter the subtlest of all the subtle disputants in the schools of Oxford. He was “famously reputed,” says Fox, “for a great clerk, a deep schoolman, and no less expert in all kinds of philosophy.” Walden, his bitter enemy, writing to Pope Martin V. respecting him, says that he was “wonderfully astonished” at the “vehemency and force of his reasonings,” and the “places of authority” with which they were fortified.⁶ To his knowledge of scholastics he added great proficiency in both the canon and civil laws. This was a branch of knowledge which stood him in more stead in after years than the other and more fashionable science. By these studies he became versed in the constitution and laws of his native country, and was fitted for taking an intelligent part in the battle which soon thereafter arose between the usurpations of the Pontiff and the rights of the crown of England. “He had an eye for the most different things,” says Lechler, speaking of Wicliffe, “and took a lively interest in the most multifarious questions.”⁷

⁵ The study of the *artes liberales*, from which the Faculty of Arts takes its name were, first, *Trivium*, comprehending grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric; then *Quadrivium*, comprehending arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. It was not uncommon to study ten years at the university—four in the Faculty of Arts, and seven, or at least five, in theology. If Wicliffe entered the university in 1335, he probably ended his studies in 1345. He became successively Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and, after an interval of several years, Bachelor of Theology, or as they then expressed it, *Sacra Pagina*.

⁶ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 554; Lond., 1641.

⁷ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 726.

But the foundation of Wicliffe's greatness was laid in a higher teaching than any that man can give. It was the illumination of his mind and the renewal of his heart by the instrumentality of the Bible that made him the Reformer—certainly, the greatest of all the Reformers who appeared before the era of Luther. Without this, he might have been remembered as an eminent scholastic of the fourteenth century, whose fame has been luminous enough to transmit a few feeble rays to our own time; but he never would have been known as the first to bear the axe into the wilderness of Papal abuses, and to strike at the roots of that great tree of which others had been content to lop off a few of the branches. The honour would not have been his to be the first to raise that GREAT PROTEST, which nations will bear onwards till it shall have made the circuit of the earth, proclaiming, "Fallen is every idol, razed is every stronghold of darkness and tyranny, and now is come salvation, and the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever."

How Wicliffe came to the knowledge of the truth it is not difficult to guess. He was, as D'Aubigné informs us, one of the scholars of the evangelical Bradwardine.⁸ As he heard the great master discourse day by day on the sovereignty of grace and the freeness of salvation, a new light would begin to break upon the mind of the young scholastic. He would turn to a diviner page than that of Plato. But for this Wicliffe might have entered the priesthood without ever having studied a single chapter of the Bible, for instruction in theology formed no part of preparation for the sacred office in those days.

No doubt theology, after a fashion, was studied, yet not a theology whose substance was drawn from the Bible, but a man-invented system. The Bachelors of Theology of the lowest grade held readings in the Bible. Not so, however, the Bachelors of the middle and highest grades: these founded their prelections upon the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Puffed up with the conceit of their mystical lore, they regarded it beneath their dignity to expound so elementary a book as the Holy Scriptures. The former were named contemptuously *Biblicists*; the latter were honourably designated *Sententiarii*, or Men of the *Sentences*.⁹

"There was no mention," says Fox, describing the early days of Wicliffe, "nor almost any word spoken of Scripture. Instead of Peter and Paul, men occupied their time in studying Aquinas and Scotus, and the Master of Sentences." "Scarcely any other thing was seen in the temples or churches, or taught or spoken of in sermons, or finally intended or gone about in their whole life, but only heaping up of certain shadowed ceremonies upon ceremonies; neither was there any end of their heaping. The people were taught to worship no other thing but that which they did see, and they did see almost nothing which they did not worship."¹⁰

In the midst of these grovelling superstitions, men were startled by the approach of a terrible visitant. The year 1348 was fatally signalised by the outbreak of a fearful pestilence, one of the most destructive in history. Appearing first in Asia, it took a

⁸ D'Aubigné, *Hist. of Reform.*, vol. v., p. 110.

⁹ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif, und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*, vol. i., p. 284; Leipzig, 1873.

¹⁰ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 555. After the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*, in the study of theology, came the patristic and scholastic divines, and especially the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas.

westerly course, traversing the globe like the pale horse and his rider in the Apocalypse, terror marching before it, and death following in its rear. It ravaged the shores of the Levant, it desolated Greece, and going on still toward the west, it struck Italy with terrible severity. Florence, the lovely capital of Etruria, it turned into a charnel-house. The genius of Boccaccio painted its horrors, and the muse of Petrarch bewailed its desolations. The latter had cause, for Laura was among its victims. Passing the Alps it entered Northern Europe, leaving, say some contemporary historians, only a tenth of the human race alive. This we know is an exaggeration; but it expresses the popular impression, and sufficiently indicates the awful character of those ravages, in which all men heard, as it were, the footsteps of coming death. The sea as well as the land was marked with its devastating prints. Ships voyaging afar on the ocean were overtaken by it, and when the winds piloted them to land, they were found to be freighted with none but the dead.

On the 1st of August the plague touched the shores of England. "Beginning at Dorchester," says Fox, "every day twenty, some days forty, some fifty, and more, dead corpses, were brought and laid together in one deep pit." On the 1st day of November it reached London, "where," says the same chronicler, "the vehement rage thereof was so hot, and did increase so much, that from the 1st day of February till about the beginning of May, in a church-yard then newly made by Smithfield [Charterhouse], about two hundred dead corpses every day were buried, besides those which in other church-yards of the city were laid also."¹¹

"In those days," says another old chronicler, Caxton, "was death without sorrow, weddings without friendship, flying without succour; scarcely were there left living folk for to bury honestly them that were dead." Of the citizens of London not fewer than 100,000 perished. The ravages of the plague were spread over all England, and a full half of the nation was struck down. From men the pestilence passed to the lower animals. Putrid carcases covered the fields; the labours of the husbandman were suspended; the soil ceased to be ploughed, and the harvest to be reaped; the courts of law were closed, and Parliament did not meet; everywhere reigned terror, mourning, and death.

This dispensation was the harbinger of a very different one. The tempest that scathed the earth, opened the way for the shower which was to fertilise it. The plague was not without its influence on that great movement which, beginning with Wicliffe, was continued in a line of confessors and martyrs, till it issued in the Reformation of Luther and Calvin. Wicliffe had been a witness of the passage of the destroyer; he had seen the human race fading from off the earth as if the ages had completed their cycle, and the end of the world was at hand. He was then in his twenty-fifth year, and could not but be deeply impressed by the awful events passing around him. "This visitation of the Almighty," says D'Aubigné, "sounded like the trumpet of the judgment-day in the heart of Wicliffe."¹² Bradwardine had already brought him to the Bible, the plague brought him to it a second time; and now, doubtless, he searched its page more earnestly than ever. He came to it, not as the theologian, seeking in it a deeper wisdom than any mystery which the scholastic philosophy could open to him; nor as the scholar, to refine his taste by its pure models,

¹¹ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 507.

¹² D'Aubigné, *Hist. of Reform.*, vol. v., p. 110.

and enrich his understanding by the sublimity of its doctrines; nor even as the polemic, in search of weapons wherewith to assail the dominant superstitions; he now came to the Bible as a lost sinner, seeking how he might be saved. Nearer every day came the messenger of the Almighty. The shadow that messenger cast before him was hourly deepening; and we can hear the young student, who doubtless in that hour felt the barrenness and insufficiency of the philosophy of the schools, lifting up with increasing vehemency the cry, "Who shall deliver me from the wrath to come?" It would seem to be a law that all who are to be reformers of their age shall first undergo a conflict of soul. They must feel in their own case the strength of error, the bitterness of the bondage in which it holds men, and stand face to face with the Omnipotent Judge, before they can become the deliverers of others. This only can inspire them with pity for the wretched captives whose fetters they seek to break, and give them courage to brave the oppressors from whose cruelty they labour to rescue them. This agony of soul did Luther and Calvin undergo; and a distress and torment similar in character, though perhaps not so great in degree, did Wicliffe endure before beginning his work. His sins, doubtless, were made a heavy burden to him—so heavy that he could not lift up his head. Standing on the brink of the pit, he says, he felt how awful it was to go down into the eternal night, "and inhabit everlasting burnings." The joy of escape from a doom so terrible made him feel how small a matter is the life of the body, and how little to be regarded are the torments which the tyrants of earth have it in their power to inflict, compared with the wrath of the Ever-living God. It is in these fires that the reformers have been hardened. It is in this school that they have learned to defy death and to sing at the stake. In this armour was Wicliffe clad before he was sent forth into the battle.

Chapter II.

Wicliffe, and the Pope's Encroachments on England.

Personal Appearance of Wicliffe—His Academic Career—Bachelor of Theology—Lectures on the Bible—England Quarrels with the Pope—Wicliffe Defends the King's Prerogative—Innocent III.—The Pope Appoints to the See of Canterbury—King John Resists—England Smitten with Interdict—Terrors of the Sentence—The Pope Deposes the King—Invites the French King to Conquer England—John becomes the Pope's Vassal—The Barons extort Magna Charta—The Pope Excommunicates the Barons—Annuls the Charter—The Courage of the Barons Saves England—Demand of Urban V.—Growth of England—National Opposition to Papal Usurpations—Papal Abuses—Statutes of Provisors and Praemunire.

Of the merely personal incidents of Wicliffe's life almost nothing is recorded. The services done for his own times, and for the ages that were to follow, occupy his historians to the exclusion of all strictly personal matters. Few have acted so large a part, and filled so conspicuous a place in the eyes of the world, of whom so few private reminiscences and details have been preserved. The charm of a singular sweetness, and the grace of a rare humility and modesty, appear to have characterised him. These qualities were blended with a fine dignity, which he wore easily, as those nobly born do the insignia of their rank. Not blameless merely, but holy, was the life he lived in an age of unexampled degeneracy. "From his portrait," says the younger M'Crie, "which has been preserved, some idea may be formed of the personal appearance of the man. He must have been a person of noble aspect and commanding attitude. The dark piercing eye, the aquiline features, and firm-set lips, with the sarcastic smile that mantles over them, exactly agree with all we know of the bold and unsparing character of the Reformer."¹

A few sentences will suffice to trace the various stages of Wicliffe's academic career. He passed twenty years at Merton College, Oxford—first as a scholar, and next as a fellow. In 1360 he was appointed to the Mastership of Balliol College. This preferment he owed to the fame he had acquired as a scholastic.²

Having become a Bachelor of Theology, Wicliffe had now the privilege of giving public lectures in the university on the Books of Scripture. He was forbidden to enter the higher field of the *Sentences* of Peter of Lombardy—if, indeed, he was desirous of doing so. This belonged exclusively to the higher grade of Bachelors and Doctors in Theology. But the expositions he now gave of the Books of Holy Writ proved of great use to himself. He became more profoundly versed in the knowledge of divine things; and thus was the professor unwittingly prepared for the great work of reforming the Church, to which the labours of his after-life were to be directed.³

He was soon thereafter appointed (1365) to be head of Canterbury Hall. This was a new college, founded by Simon de Islip,⁴ Archbishop of Canterbury. The constitution of

¹ Thomas M'Crie, D.D., LL.D., *Annals of English Presbytery*, p. 36; Lond., 1872.

² Sorimer's *Lechler*, i. 137.

³ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 10; Oxford, 1820. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. i., pp. 268—270.

⁴ This primate was a good man, but not exempt from the superstition of his age. Fox tells us that he presented one of his churches with the original vestments in which St. Peter was supposed to have celebrated mass! Their sanctity, doubtless, had defended these venerable robes from the moths!

this college ordained that its fellowships should be held by four monks and eight secular priests. The rivalry existing between the two orders was speedily productive of broils, and finally led to a conflict with the university authorities; and the founder, finding the plan unworkable, dismissed the four monks, replaced them with seculars, and appointed Wicliffe as Master or Warden. Within a year Islip died, and was succeeded in the primacy by Langham, who, himself a monk, restored the expelled regulars, and, displacing Wicliffe from his Wardenship, appointed a new head to the college. Wicliffe then appealed to the Pope; but Langham had the greater influence at Rome, and after a long delay, in 1370, the cause was given against Wicliffe.⁵

It was pending this decision that events happened which opened to Wicliffe a wider arena than the halls of Oxford. Henceforth, it was not against the monks of Canterbury Hall, or even the Primate of England—it was against the Prince Pontiff of Christendom that Wicliffe was to do battle. In order to understand what we are now to relate, we must go back a century. The throne of England was then filled by King John, a vicious, pusillanimous, and despotic monarch, but nevertheless capable by fits and starts of daring and brave deeds. In 1205, Hubert, the Primate of England, died. The junior canons of Canterbury met clandestinely that very night, and without any *congé d'elire*, elected Reginald, their sub-prior, Archbishop of Canterbury, and installed him in the archiepiscopal throne before midnight.⁶ By the next dawn Reginald was on his way to Rome, whither he had been dispatched by his brethren to solicit the Pope's confirmation of his election. When the king came to the knowledge of the transaction, he was enraged at its temerity, and set about procuring the election of the Bishop of Norwich to the primacy. Both parties—the king and the canons—sent agents to Rome to plead their cause before the Pope.

The man who then filled the chair of Peter, Innocent III., was vigorously prosecuting the audacious project of Gregory VII., of subordinating the rights and power of princes to the Papal See, and of taking into his own hands the appointment to all the episcopal sees of Christendom, that through the bishops and priests, now reduced to an absolute monarchy entirely dependent upon the Vatican, he might govern at his will all the kingdoms of Europe. No Pope ever was more successful in this ambitious policy than the man before whom the King of England on the one hand, and the canons of Canterbury on the other, now carried their cause. Innocent annulled both elections—that of the canons and that of the king—and made his own nominee, Cardinal Langton, be chosen to the See of Canterbury.⁷ But this was not all. The king had appealed to the Pope; and Innocent saw in this a precedent, not to be let slip, for putting in the gift of the Pontiff in all time coming what, after the Papal throne, was the most important dignity in the Roman Church.

John could not but see the danger, and feel the humiliation implied in the step taken by Innocent. The See of Canterbury was the first seat of dignity and jurisdiction in England, the throne excepted. A foreign power had appointed one to fill that august seat. In an age

⁵ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 293. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 17. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. i., p. 301.

⁶ Gabriel d'Emillianne, *Hist. of Monast. Orders*, Preface; Lond., 1693. Hume, *Hist. of England*, vol. i., chap. 11, p. 185; Lond., 1826. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 325; Lond., 1641.

⁷ Gabriel d'Emillianne, *Hist. of Monast. Orders*, Preface. Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, Reign of King John.

in which the ecclesiastical was a more formidable authority than the temporal, this was an alarming encroachment on the royal prerogative and the nation's independence. Why should the Pope be content to appoint to the See of Canterbury? Why should he not also appoint to the throne, the one other seat in the realm that rose above it? The king protested with many oaths that the Pope's nominee should never sit in the archiepiscopal chair. He waxed bold for the moment, and began the battle as if he meant to win it. He turned the canons of Canterbury out of doors, ordered all the prelates and abbots to leave the kingdom, and bade defiance to the Pope. It was not difficult to foresee what would be the end of a conflict carried on by the weakest of England's monarchs, against the haughtiest and most powerful of Rome's Popes. The Pontiff smote England with interdict;⁸ the king had offended, and the whole nation must be punished along with him. Before we can realise the terrors of such a sentence, we must forget all that the past three centuries have taught us, and surrender our imaginations to the superstitious beliefs which armed the interdict with its tremendous power.

The men of those times, on whom this doom fell, saw the gates of heaven locked by the strong hand of the Pontiff, so that none might enter who came from the unhappy realm lying under the Papal ban. All who departed this life must wander forlorn as disembodied ghosts in some doleful region, amid unknown sufferings, till it should please him who carried the keys to open the closed gates. As the earthly picture of this spiritual doom, all the symbols of grace and all the ordinances of religion were suspended. 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 on the ground; infants were baptised 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 person or apparel. It was meet that only signs of distress and mourning and woe should be visible throughout a land over which there rested the wrath of the Almighty; for so did men account the ban of the Pontiff.

King John braved this state of matters for two whole years. But Pope Innocent was not to be turned from his purpose; he resolved to visit and bow the obstinacy of the monarch by a yet more terrible infliction. He pronounced sentence of excommunication upon John, deposing him from his throne, and absolving his subjects from allegiance. To carry out this sentence it needed an armed force, and Innocent, casting his eyes around him, fixed on Philip Augustus, King of France, as the most suitable person to deal the blow on John, offering him the Kingdom of England for his pains. It was not the interest of Philip to undertake such an enterprise, for the same boundless and uncontrollable power which was tumbling the King of England from his throne might the next day, on some ghostly pretence or other, hurl King Philip Augustus from his. But the prize was a tempting one, and the monarch of France, collecting a mighty armament, prepared to cross the Channel and invade England.⁹

When King John saw the brink on which he stood, his courage or obstinacy forsook him. He craved an interview with Pandulf, the Pope's legate, and after a short conference,

⁸ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 327. Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, p. 186.

⁹ Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, Reign of King John, chap. 11, p. 189.

he promised to submit himself unreservedly to the Papal See. Besides engaging to make full restitution to the clergy for the losses they had suffered, he “resigned England and Ireland to God, to St. Peter, and St. Paul, and to Pope Innocent, and to his successors in the apostolic chair; he agreed to hold these dominions as feudatory of the Church of Rome by the annual payment of a thousand marks; and he stipulated that if he or his successors should ever presume to revoke or infringe this charter, they should instantly, except upon admonition they repented of their offence, forfeit all right to their dominions.” The transaction was finished by the king doing homage to Pandulf, as the Pope’s legate, with all the submissive rites which the feudal law required of vassals before their liege lord and superior. Taking off his crown, it is said, John laid it on the ground; and the legate, to show the mightiness of his master, spurning it with his foot, kicked it about like a worthless bauble; and then, picking it out of the dust, placed it on the craven head of the monarch. This transaction took place on the 15th May, 1213. There is no moment of profounder humiliation than this in the annals of England.¹⁰

But the barons were resolved not to be the slaves of a Pope; their intrepidity and patriotism wiped off the ineffable disgrace which the baseness of the monarch had inflicted on the country. Unsheathing their swords, they vowed to maintain the ancient liberties of England, or die in the attempt. Appearing before the king at Oxford, April, 1215, “here,” said they, “is the charter which consecrates the liberties confirmed by Henry II., and which you also have solemnly sworn to observe.” The king stormed. “I will not,” said he, “grant you liberties which would make me a slave.” John forgot that he had already become a slave. But the barons were not to be daunted by haughty words which the king had no power to maintain: he was odious to the whole nation; and on the 15th of June, 1215, John signed the MAGNA CHARTA at Runnymede.¹¹ This was in effect to tell Innocent that he revoked his vow of vassalage, and took back the kingdom which he had laid at his feet.

When tidings were carried to Rome of what John had done, the ire of Innocent III. was kindled to the uttermost. That he, the vicar of God, who held all the crowns of Christendom in his hand, and stood with his foot planted upon all its kingdoms, should be so affronted and so defied, was not to be borne! Was he not the feudal lord of the kingdom? was not England rightfully his? had it not been laid at his feet by a deed and covenant solemnly ratified? Who were these wretched barons, that they should withstand the Pontifical will, and place the independence of their country above the glory of the Church? Innocent instantly launched an anathema against these impious and rebellious men, at the same time inhibiting the king from carrying out the provisions of the Charter which he had signed, or in any way fulfilling its stipulations.¹²

But Innocent went still farther. In the exercise of that singular prescience which belongs to that system by which this truculent holder of the tiara was so thoroughly inspired, and of which he was so perfect an embodiment, he divined the true nature of the transaction at Runnymede. Magna Charta was a great political protest against himself and his system. It inaugurated an order of political ideas, and a class of political rights, entirely antagonistic to the fundamental principles and claims of the Papacy. Magna Charta was constitutional

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i, p. 329.

¹¹ Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, chap. 11, p. 194. Cobbett, *Parliament. Hist. of Eng.*, p. 9; Lond., 1806.

¹² Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, vol i., p. 196.

liberty standing up before the face of the Papal absolutism, and throwing down the gage of battle to it. Innocent felt that he must grapple now with this hateful and monstrous birth, and strangle it in its cradle; otherwise, should he wait till it was grown, it might be too strong for him to crush. Already it had reft away from him one of the fairest of those realms which he had made dependent upon the tiara; its assaults on the Papal prerogative would not end here; he must trample it down before its insolence had grown by success, and other kingdoms and their rulers, inoculated with the impiety of these audacious barons, had begun to imitate their example. Accordingly, fulminating a bull from the plenitude of his apostolic power, and from the authority of his commission, as set by God over the kingdoms “to pluck up and destroy, to build and to plant,” he annulled and abrogated the Charter, declaring all its obligations and guarantees void.¹³

In the signing of the Great Charter we see a new force coming into the field, to make war against that tyranny which first corrupted the souls of men before it enslaved their bodies. The divine or evangelic element came first, political liberty came after. The former is the true nurse of the latter; for in no country can liberty endure and ripen its fruits where it has not had its beginning in the moral part of man. Innocent was already contending against the evangelical principle in the crusades against the Albigenses in the south of France, and now there appeared, among the hardy nations of the North, another antagonist, the product of the first, that had come to strengthen the battle against a Power, which from its seat on the Seven Hills was absorbing all rights and enslaving all nations.

The bold attitude of the barons saved the independence of the nation. Innocent went to the grave; feebler men succeeded him in the Pontifical chair; the Kings of England mounted the throne without taking the oath of fealty to the Pope, though they continued to transmit, year by year, the thousand marks which John had agreed to pay into the Papal treasury. At last, in the reign of Edward II., this annual payment was quietly dropped. No remonstrance against its discontinuance came from Rome.

But in 1365, after the payment of the thousand marks had been intermitted for thirty-five years, it was suddenly demanded by Pope Urban V. The demand was accompanied with an intimation that should the king, Edward III., fail to make payment, not only of the annual tribute, but of all arrears, he would be summoned to Rome to answer before his liege lord, the Pope, for contumacy. This was in effect to say to England, “Prostrate yourself a second time before the Pontifical chair.” The England of Edward III. was not the England of King John; and this demand, as unexpected as it was insulting, stirred the nation to its depths. During the century which had elapsed since the Great Charter was signed, England’s growth in all the elements of greatness had been marvellously rapid. She had fused Norman and Saxon into one people; she had formed her language; she had extended her commerce; she had reformed her laws; she had founded seats of learning, which had already become renowned; she had fought great battles and won brilliant victories; her valour was felt and her power feared by the Continental nations; and when this summons to do homage as a vassal of the Pope was heard, the nation hardly knew whether to meet it with indignation or with derision.

¹³ Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, vol. i., p. 196.

What made the folly of Urban in making such a demand the more conspicuous, was the fact that the political battle against the Papacy had been gradually strengthening since the era of Magna Charta. Several stringent Acts had been passed with the view of vindicating the majesty of the law, and of guarding the property of the nation and the liberties of the subject against the persistent and ambitious encroachments of Rome. Nor were these Acts unneeded. Swarm after swarm of aliens, chiefly Italians, had invaded the kingdom, and were devouring its substance, and subverting its laws. Foreign ecclesiastics were nominated by the Pope to rich livings in England; and, although they neither resided in the country nor performed any duty in it, they received the revenues of their English livings, and expended them abroad. For instance, in the sixteenth year of Edward III., two Italian cardinals were named to two vacancies in the dioceses of Canterbury and York, worth annually 2,000 marks. "The first-fruits and reservations of the Pope," said the men of those times, "are more hurtful to the realm than all the king's wars."¹⁴ In a Parliament held in London in 1246, we find it complained of, among other grievances, that "the Pope, not content with Peter's pence, oppressed the kingdom by extorting from the clergy great contributions without the king's consent; that the English were forced to prosecute their rights out of the kingdom, against the customs and written laws thereof; that oaths, statutes, and privileges were enervated; and that in the parishes where the Italians were beneficed, there were no alms, no hospitality, no preaching, no divine service, no care of souls, nor any reparations done to the parsonage houses."¹⁵

A worldly dominion cannot stand without revenues. The ambition and the theology of Rome went hand in hand, and supported one another. Not an article was there in her creed, not a ceremony in her worship, not a department in her government, that did not tend to advance her power and increase her gain. Her dogmas, rites, and orders were so many pretexts for exacting money. Images, purgatory, relics, pilgrimages, indulgences, jubilees, canonisations, miracles, masses, were but taxes under another name. Tithes, annats, investitures, appeals, reservations, expectatives, bulls, and briefs were so many drains for conveying the substance of the nations of Christendom to Rome. Every new saint cost the country of his birth 100,000 crowns. A consecrated pall for an English archbishop was bought for £1,200. In the year 1250, Walter Gray, Archbishop of York, paid £10,000 for that mystic ornament, without which he might not presume to call councils, make chrism, dedicate churches, or ordain bishops and clerks. According to the present value of money, the price of this trifle may amount to £100,000. With good reason might the Carmelite, Baptista Mantuan, say, "If Rome gives anything, it is trifles only. She takes your gold, but gives nothing more solid in return than words. Alas! Rome is governed only by money."¹⁶

These and similar usurpations were rapidly converting the English soil into an Italian glebe. The land was tilled that it might feed foreign monks, and Englishmen were becoming hewers of wood and drawers of water to the Roman hierarchy. If the cardinals of Rome must have sumptuous banquets, and purple robes, and other and more questionable delights, it is not we, said the English people, that ought to be fleeced to

¹⁴ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 551.

¹⁵ Cobbett, *Parl. Hist. Eng.*, vol. i., cols. 22, 23; Lond., 1806.

¹⁶ "Si quid Roma dabit, nugas dabit, accipit aurum, Verba dat, heu! Romae nunc sola pecunia regnat."

furnish these things; we demand that a stop be put to this ruinous game before we are utterly beggared by it.¹⁷ To remedy these grievances, now become intolerable, a series of enactments were passed by Parliament. In the twentieth year of Edward's reign, all alien monks were ordered to depart the kingdom by Michaelmas, and their livings were given to English scholars.¹⁸ By another Act, the revenues of all livings held by foreign ecclesiastics, cardinals, and others, were given to the king during their lives.¹⁹ It was further enacted—and the statute shows the extraordinary length to which the abuse had gone—"that all such alien enemies as be advanced to livings here in England (being in their own country shoemakers, tailors, or chamberlains to cardinals) should depart before Michaelmas, and their livings be disposed to poor English scholars."²⁰ The payment of the 2,000 marks to the two cardinals already mentioned was stopped. It was "enacted further, that no Englishman should bring into the realm, to any bishop, or other, any bull, or any other letters from Rome, or any alien, unless he show the same to the Chancellor or Warden of the Cinque Ports, upon loss of all he hath."²¹ One person, not having the fear of this statute before his eyes, ventured to bring a Papal bull into England; but he had nearly paid the forfeit of his life for his rashness; he was condemned to the gallows, and would have been hanged but for the intercession of the Chancellor.²²

We can hardly wonder at the popular indignation against these abuses, when we think of the host of evils they brought in their train. The power of the king was weakened, the jurisdiction of the tribunals was invaded, and the exchequer was impoverished. It was computed that the tax paid to the Pope for ecclesiastical dignities was five-fold that paid to the king from the whole realm.²³ And, further, as the consequence of this transportation to other countries of the treasure of the nation, learning and the arts were discouraged, hospitals were falling into decay, the churches were becoming dilapidated, public worship was neglected, the lands were falling out of tillage, and to this cause the Parliament attributed the frequent famines and plagues that had of late visited the country, and which had resulted in a partial depopulation of England.

Two statutes in particular were passed during this period to set bounds to the Papal usurpations; these were the well-known and famous statutes of Provisors and Praemunire. The first declared it illegal to procure any presentations to any benefice from the Court of Rome, or to accept any living otherwise than as the law directed through the chapters and ordinary electors. All such appointments were to be void, the parties concerned in them were to be punished with fine and imprisonment, and no appeal was allowed beyond the king's court. The second statute, which came three years afterwards, forbade all appeals on questions of property from the English tribunals to the courts at Rome, under pain of confiscation of goods and imprisonment during the king's pleasure.²⁴ Such appeals had

¹⁷ Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, Reign of Edw. III., chap. 16.

¹⁸ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 551.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² D'Aubigné, *Hist. of Reform.*, vol. v., p. 103; Edin., 1853.

²³ Cotton's *Abridgment*, p. 128, 50 Edw. III., *apud* Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 34; Oxford, 1820. Fox, *Acts and Mon.* vol. i., p. 552.

²⁴ Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, vol. i. p. 335; Lond. 1826.

become very common, but a stop was now put to them by the vigorous application of the statute; but the law against foreign nominations to benefices it was not so easy to enforce, and the enactment, although it abated, did not abolish the abuse.

Chapter III.

Wicliffe's Battle with Rome for England's Independence.

Impatience of the King and the Nation—Assembling of Lords and Commons—Shall England Bow to Rome?—The Debate—The Pope's Claim Unanimously Repudiated—England on the Road to Protestantism—Wicliffe's Influence—Wicliffe Attacked by an Anonymous Monk—His Reply—Vindicates the Nation's Independence—A Momentous Issue—A Greater Victory than Crecy—His Appeal to Rome Lost—Begins to be regarded as the Centre of a New Age.

When England began to resist the Papacy it began to grow in power and wealth. Loosening its neck from the yoke of Rome, it lifted up its head proudly among the nations. Innocent III., crowning a series of usurpations by the submission of King John—an act of baseness that stands alone in the annals of England—had sustained himself master of the kingdom. But the great Pontiff was bidden, somewhat gruffly, stand off. The Northern nobles, who knew little about theology, but cared a great deal for independence, would be masters in their own isle, and they let the haughty wearer of the tiara know this when they framed Magna Charta. Turning to King John they told him, in effect, that if he was to be the slave of an Italian priest, he could not be the master of Norman barons. The tide once turned continued to flow; the two famous statutes of Provisors and Praemunire were enacted. These were a sort of double breast-work: the first was meant to keep out the flood of usurpations that was setting in from Rome upon England; and the second was intended to close the door against the tithes, revenues, appeals, and obedience, which were flowing in an ever-augmenting stream from England to the Vatican. Great Britain never performed an act of resistance to the Papacy but there came along with it a quickening of her own energies and a strengthening of her liberty. So was it now; her soul began to bound upwards.

This was the moment chosen by Urban V. to advance his insolent demand. How often have Popes failed to read the signs of the times! Urban had signally failed to do so. The nation, though still submitting to the spiritual burdens of Rome, was becoming restive under her supremacy and pecuniary exactions. The Parliament had entered on a course of legislation to set bounds to these avaricious encroachments. The king too was getting sore at this “defacing of the ancient laws, and spoiling of his crown,” and with the laurels of Crecy fresh on his brow, he was in no mood for repairing to Rome as Urban commanded, and paying down a thousand marks for permission to wear the crown which he was so well able to defend with his sword. Edward assembled his Parliament in 1366, and, laying the Pope's letter before it, bade it take counsel and say what answer should be returned.

“Give us,” said the estates of the realm, “a day to think over the matter.”¹ The king willingly granted them that space of time. They assembled again on the morrow—prelates, lords, and commons. Shall England, now becoming mistress of the seas, bow at the feet of the Pope? It is a great crisis! We eagerly scan the faces of the council, for the future of England hangs on its resolve. Shall the nation retrograde to the days of John, or shall it go forward to even higher glory than it has achieved under Edward? Wicliffe was present on

¹ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 552.

that occasion, and has preserved a summary of the speeches. The record is interesting as perhaps the earliest reported debate in Parliament, and still more interesting from the gravity of the issues depending thereon.²

A military baron is the first to rise. "The Kingdom of England," said he, opening the debate, "was won by the sword, and by that sword has been defended. Let the Pope then gird on his sword, and come and try to exact this tribute by force, and I for one am ready to resist him." This is not spoken like an obedient son of the Church, but all the more a leal subject of England. Scarcely more encouraging to the supporters of the Papal claim was the speech of the second baron. "He only," said he, "is entitled to secular tribute who legitimately exercises secular rule, and is able to give secular protection. The Pope cannot legitimately do either; he is a minister of the Gospel, not a temporal ruler. His duty is to give ghostly counsel, not corporal protection. Let us see that he abide within the limits of his spiritual office, where we shall obey him; but if he shall choose to transgress these limits, he must take the consequences." "The Pope," said a third, following in the line of the second speaker, "calls himself the servant of the servants of God. Very well: he can claim recompense only for service done. But where are the services which he renders to this land? Does he minister to us in spirituals? Does he help us in temporals? Does he not rather greedily drain our treasures, and often for the benefit of our enemies? I give my voice against this tribute."

"On what grounds was this tribute originally demanded?" asked another. "Was it not for absolving King John, and relieving the kingdom from interdict? But to bestow spiritual benefits for money is sheer simony; it is a piece of ecclesiastical swindling. Let the lords spiritual and temporal wash their hands of a transaction so disgraceful. But if it is as feudal superior of the kingdom that the Pope demands this tribute, why ask a thousand marks? why not ask the throne, the soil, the people of England? If his title be good for these thousand marks, it is good for a great deal more. The Pope, on the same principle, may declare the throne vacant, and fill it with whomsoever he pleases." "Pope Urban tells us"—so spoke another—"that all kingdoms are Christ's, and that he as His vicar holds England for Christ; but as the Pope is peccable, and may abuse his trust, it appears to me that it were better that we should hold our land directly and alone of Christ." "Let us," said the last speaker, "go at once to the root of this matter. King John had no right to gift away the Kingdom of England without the consent of the nation. That consent was never given. The golden seal of the king, and the seals of the few nobles whom John persuaded or coerced to join him in this transaction, do not constitute the national consent. If John gifted his subjects to Innocent like so many chattels, Innocent may come and take his property if he can. We the people of England had no voice in the matter; we hold the bargain null and void from the beginning."³

² Lechler makes the bold supposition that Wicliffe was a member of this Parliament. He finds it upon a passage in Wicliffe's treatise, *The Church*, to the effect that the Bishop of Rochester told him (Wicliffe) in public Parliament, with great vehemence, that conclusions were condemned by the Roman Curia. He thinks it probable from this that the Reformer had at one time been in Parliament. (Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 332.)

³ These speeches are reported by Wicliffe in a treatise preserved in the Selden MSS., and printed by the Rev. John Lewis in his *Life of Wiclif*, App. No. 30, p. 349. Oxford, 1820.

So spake the Parliament of Edward III. Not a voice was raised in support of the arrogant demand of Urban. Prelate, baron, and commoner united in repudiating it as insulting to England; and these men expressed themselves in that plain, brief, and pithy language which betokens deep conviction as well as determined resolution. If need were, these bold words would be followed by deeds equally bold. The hands of the barons were on the hilts of their swords as they uttered them. They were, in the first place, subjects of England; and, in the second place, members of the Church of Rome. The Pope accounts no one a good Catholic who does not reverse this order and put his spiritual above his temporal allegiance—his Church before his country. This firm attitude of the Parliament put an end to the matter. The question which Urban had really raised was this, and nothing less than this: Shall the Pope or the king be sovereign of England? The answer of the Parliament was, “Not the Pope, but the king;” and from that hour the claim of the former was not again advanced, at least in explicit terms.

The decision at which the Parliament arrived was unanimous. It reproduced in brief compass both the argument and spirit of the speeches. Few such replies were in those days carried to the foot of the Papal throne. “Forasmuch”—so ran the decision of the three estates of the realm—“as neither King John, nor any other king, could bring his realm and kingdom into such thralldom and subjection but by common assent of Parliament, 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.”⁴

Thus far had England, in the middle of the fourteenth century, advanced on the road to the Reformation. The estates of the realm had unanimously repudiated one of the two great branches of the Papacy. The dogma of the vicarship binds up the spiritual and the temporal in one anomalous jurisdiction. England had denied the latter; and this was a step towards questioning, and finally repudiating, the former. It was quite natural that the nation should first discover the falsity of the temporal supremacy, before seeing the equal falsity of the spiritual. Urban had put the matter in a light in which no one could possibly mistake it. In demanding payment of a thousand marks annually, he translated, as we say, the theory of the temporal supremacy into a palpable fact. The theory might have passed a little longer without question, had it not been put into this ungracious form. The halo which encompassed the Papal fabric during the Middle Ages began to wane, and men took courage to criticise a system whose immense prestige had blinded them hitherto. Such was the state of mind in which we now find the English nation. It betokened a reformation at no very great distance. But largely, indeed mainly, had Wicliffe contributed to bring about this state of feeling in England. He had been the teacher of the barons and commons. He had propounded these doctrines from his chair in Oxford before they were proclaimed by the assembled estates of the realm. But for the spirit and views with which he had been quietly leavening the nation, the demand of Urban might have met a different reception. It would not, we believe, have been complied with; the position England had now attained in Europe, and the deference paid her by foreign nations, would have made submission

⁴ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 552. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 19. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. I., p. 266; 266; Lond., 1828.

impossible; but without Wicliffe the resistance would not have been placed on so intelligible a ground, nor would it have been urged with so resolute a patriotism. The firm attitude assumed effectually extinguished the hopes of the Vatican, and rid England ever after of all such irritating and insolent demands.

That Wicliffe's position in this controversy was already a prominent one, and that the sentiments expressed in Parliament were but the echo of his teachings in Oxford, are attested by an event which now took place. The Pope found a supporter in England, though not in Parliament. A monk, whose name has not come down to us, stood forward to demonstrate the righteousness of the claim of Urban V. This controversialist laid down the fundamental proposition that, as vicar of Christ, the Pope is the feudal superior of monarchs, and the lord paramount of their kingdoms. Thence he deduced the following conclusions:—that all sovereigns owe him obedience and tribute; that vassalage was specially due from the English monarch in consequence of the surrender of the kingdom to the Pope by John; that Edward had clearly forfeited his throne by the non-payment of the annual tribute; and, in fine, that all ecclesiastics, regulars and seculars, were exempt from the civil jurisdiction, and under no obligation to obey the citation or answer before the tribunal of the magistrate. Singling out Wicliffe by name, the monk challenged him to disprove the propositions he had advanced.

Wicliffe took up the challenge which had been thrown down to him. The task was one which involved tremendous hazard; not because Wicliffe's logic was weak, or his opponent's unanswerable; but because the power which he attacked could ill brook to have its foundations searched out, and its hollowness exposed, and because the more completely Wicliffe should triumph, the more probable was it that he would feel the heavy displeasure of the enemy against whom he did battle. He had a cause pending in the Vatican at that very moment, and if he vanquished the Pope in England, how easy would it be for the Pope to vanquish him at Rome! Wicliffe did not conceal from himself this and other greater perils; nevertheless, he stepped down into the arena. In opening the debate, he styles himself "the king's peculiar clerk,"⁵ from which we infer that the royal eye had already lighted upon him, attracted by his erudition and talents, and that one of the royal chaplaincies had been conferred upon him.

The controversy was conducted on Wicliffe's side with great moderation. He contents himself with stating the grounds of objection to the temporal power, rather than working out the argument and pressing it home. These are the natural rights of men, the laws of the realm of England, and the precepts of Holy Writ. "Already," he says, "a third and more of England is in the hands of the Pope. There cannot," he argues, "be two temporal sovereigns in one country; either Edward is king or Urban is king. We made our choice. We accept Edward of England and refuse Urban of Rome." Then he falls back on the debate in Parliament, and presents a summary of the speeches of the spiritual and temporal lords.⁶ Thus far Wicliffe puts the estates of the realm in the front, and covers himself with

⁵ "But inasmuch as I am the king's peculiar clerk, [*peculiaris regis clericus*], I the more willingly undertake the office of defending and counselling that the king exercises his just rule in the realm of England when he refuses tribute to the Roman Pontiff." (Codd. MSS. Joh. Seldeni; Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, Appendix, No. 30.)

⁶ The same from which we have already quoted.

the shield of their authority: but doubtless the sentiments are his; the stamp of his individuality and genius is plainly to be seen upon them. From his bow was the arrow shot by which the temporal power of the Papacy in England was wounded. If his courage was shown in not declining the battle, his prudence and wisdom were equally conspicuous in the manner in which he conducted it. It was the affair of the king and of the nation, and not his merely; and it was masterly tactics to put it so as that it might be seen to be no contemptible quarrel between an unknown monk and an Oxford doctor, but a controversy between the King of England and the Pontiff of Rome.⁷

And the service now rendered by Wicliffe was great. The eyes of all the European nations were at that moment on England, watching with no little anxiety the issue of the conflict which she was then waging with a power that sought to reduce the whole earth to vassalage. If England should bow herself before the Papal chair, and the victor of Crecy do homage to Urban for his crown, what monarch could hope to stand erect, and what nation could expect to rescue its independence from the grasp of the tiara? The submission of England would bring such an accession of prestige and strength to the Papacy, that the days of Innocent III. would return, and a tempest of excommunications and interdicts would again lower over every throne, and darken the sky of every kingdom, as during the reign of the mightiest of the Papal chiefs. The crisis was truly a great one. It was now to be seen whether the tide was to advance or to go back. The decision of England determined that the waters of Papal tyranny should henceforth recede, and every nation hailed the result with joy as a victory won for itself. To England the benefits which accrued from this conflict were lasting, as well as great. The fruits reaped from the great battles of Crecy and Poitiers have long since disappeared; but as regards this victory won over Urban V., England is enjoying at this very hour the benefits which resulted from it. But it must not be forgotten that, though Edward III. and his Parliament occupied the foreground, the real champion in this battle was Wicliffe.⁸

It is hardly necessary to say that Wicliffe was nonsuited at Rome. His wardenship of Canterbury Hall, to which he was appointed by the founder, and from which he had been extruded by Archbishop Langham, was finally lost. His appeal to the Pope was made in 1367; but a long delay took place, and it was not till 1370 that the judgment of the court of Rome was pronounced, ratifying his extrusion, and putting Langham's monks in sole possession of Canterbury College. Wicliffe had lost his wardenship, but he had largely contributed to save the independence of his country. In winning this fight he had done more for it than if he had conquered on many battle-fields. He had yet greater services to render to England, and yet greater penalties to pay for his patriotism. Soon after this he took his degree of Doctor in Divinity—a distinction more rare in those days than in ours; and the chair of theology, to which he was now raised, extended the circle of his influence,

⁷ See Wicliffe's Tractate, which Lewis gives in his Appendix, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 349.

⁸ Wicliffe had pioneers who contested the temporal power of the Pope. One of these, we have already seen, was Arnold of Brescia. Nearer home he had two notable precursors: the first, Marsilius Patavinus, who in his work, *Defensor Pacis*, written in defence of the Emperor Lewis, excommunicated by Clement VI., maintains that "the Pope hath no superiority above other bishops, much less above the king" (Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 509); and the second, William Occam, in England, also a strenuous opponent of the temporal power. See his eight propositions on the temporal power of the Papacy, in Fox.

and paved the way for the fulfilment of his great mission. From this time Wicliffe began to be regarded as the centre of a new age.

Chapter IV.

Wicliffe's Battle with the Mendicant Friars.

Wicliffe's Mental Conflicts—Rise of the Monastic Orders—Fascinating Pictures of Monks and Monasteries—Early Corruption of the Orders—Testimony of Contemporary Witnesses—The New Monastic Orders—Reason for their Institution—St. Francis—His Early Life—His Appearance before Innocent III.—Commission to Found an Order—Rapid Increase of the Franciscans—St. Dominic—His Character—Founds the Dominicans—Preaching Missionaries and Inquisitors—Constitution of the New Orders—The Old and New Monks Compared—Their Vow of Poverty—How Evaded—Their Garb—Their Vast Wealth—Palatial Edifices—Their Frightful Degeneracy—Their Swarms Overspread England—Their Illegal Practices—The Battle against them Begun by Armachanus—He Complains against them to the Pope—His Complaint Disregarded—He Dies.

We come now to relate briefly the second great battle which our Reformer was called to wage; and which, if we have regard to the prior date of its origin—for it was begun before the conclusion of that of which we have just spoken—ought to be called the first. We refer to his contest with the mendicant friars. It was still going on when his battle against the temporal power was finished; in fact it continued, more or less, to the end of his life. The controversy involved great principles, and had a marked influence on the mind of Wicliffe in the way of developing his views on the whole subject of the Papacy. From questioning the mere abuse of the Papal prerogative, he began to question its legitimacy. At every step a new doubt presented itself; this sent him back again to the Scriptures. Every page he read shed new light into his mind, and discovered some new invention or error of man, till at last he saw that the system of the Gospel and the system of the Papacy were utterly and irreconcilably at variance, and that if he would follow the one he must finally renounce the other. This decision, as we gather from Fox, was not made without many tears and groans. "After he had a long time professed divinity in Oxford," says the chronicler, "and perceiving the true doctrine of Christ's Gospel to be adulterate, and defiled with so many filthy inventions of bishops, sects of monks, and dark errors, and that he after long debating and deliberating with himself (with many secret sighs and bewailings in his mind the general ignorance of the whole world) could no longer suffer or abide the same, he at the last determined with himself to help and to remedy such things as he saw to be wide and out of the way. But forasmuch as he saw that this dangerous meddling could not be attempted or stirred without great trouble, neither that these things, which had been so long time with use and custom rooted and grafted in men's minds, could be suddenly plucked up or taken away, he thought with himself that this matter should be done by little and little. Wherefore he, taking his original at small occasions, thereby opened himself a way or mean to greater matters. First he assailed his adversaries in logical and metaphysical questions . . . by these originals the way was made unto greater points, so that at length he came to touch the matters of the Sacraments, and other abuses of the Church."¹

The rise of the monastic orders, and their rapid and prodigious diffusion over all Christendom, and even beyond it, are too well known to require minute or lengthy

¹ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p.556.

narration. The tombs of Egypt, the deserts of Thebais, the mountains of Sinai, the rocks of Palestine, the islands of the Aegean and Tuscan Seas, were peopled with colonies of hermits and anchorites, who, fleeing from the world, devoted themselves to a life of solitude and spiritual meditation. The secularity and corruption of the parochial clergy, engendered by the wealth which flowed in upon the Church in early times, rendered necessary, it was supposed, a new order, which might exhibit a great and outstanding example of virtue. Here, in these anchorites, was the very pattern, it was believed, which the age needed. These men, living in seclusion, or gathered in little fraternities, had renounced the world, had taken a vow of poverty and obedience, and were leading humble, laborious, frugal, chaste, virtuous lives, and exemplifying, in a degenerate time, the holiness of the Gospel. The austerity and poverty of the monastery redeemed Christianity from the stain which the affluence and pride of the cathedral had brought upon it. So the world believed, and felt itself edified by the spectacle.

For a while, doubtless, the monastery was the asylum of a piety which had been banished from the world. Fascinating pictures have been drawn of the sanctity of these establishments. Within their walls peace made her abode when violence distracted the outer world. The land around them, from the skilful and careful cultivation of the brotherhood, smiled like a garden, while the rest of the soil, through neglect or barbarism, was sinking into a desert; here letters were cultivated, and the arts of civilised life preserved, while the general community, engrossed in war, prosecuted but languidly the labours of peace. To the gates of the monastery came the halt, the blind, the deaf; and the charitable inmates never failed to pity their misery and supply their necessities. In fine, while the castle of the neighbouring baron resounded with the clang of weapons, or the noise of wassail, the holy chimes ascending from the monastery at morn and eve, told of the devotions, the humble prayers, and the fervent praises in which the Fathers passed their time.

These pictures are so lovely, and one is so gratified to think that ages so rude, and so ceaselessly buffeted by war, had nevertheless their quiet retreats, where the din of arms did not drown the voice of the muses, or silence the song of piety, that we feel almost as if it were an offence against religion to doubt their truth. But we confess that our faith in them would have been greater if they had been painted by contemporary chroniclers, instead of being mostly the creation of poets who lived in a later age. We really do not know where to look in real history for the originals of these enchanting descriptions. Still, we do not doubt that there is a measure of truth in them; that, during the early period of their existence, these establishments did in some degree shelter piety and preserve art, did dispense alms and teach industry. And we know that even down to nearly the Reformation there were instances of men who, hidden from the world, here lived alone with Christ, and fed their piety at the fountains of the Word of God. These instances were, however, rare, and, suggested comparisons not favourable to the rest of the Fathers.

But one thing history leaves in no wise doubtful, even that the monastic orders speedily and to a fearful degree became corrupt. It would have been a miracle if it had been otherwise. The system was in violation of the fundamental laws of nature and of society, as well as of the Bible. How can virtue be cultivated apart from the exercise of it? If the world is a theatre of temptation, it is still more a school of discipline, and a nursery of

virtue. “Living in them,” says a nun of Cambray, a descendant of Sir Thomas More, “I can speak by experience, if one be not in a right course of prayer, and other exercises between God and our soul, one’s nature groweth *much worse* than ever it would have been if she had lived in the world.”² It is in society, not in solitude, that we can be trained to self-denial, to patience, to loving-kindness and magnanimity. In solitude there is nothing to be borne with or overcome, save cold, or hunger, or the beasts of the desert, which, however much they may develop the powers of the body, cannot nourish the virtues of the soul.

In point of fact, these monasteries did, we know, become eventually more corrupt than the world which their inmates had forsaken. By the year 1100 one of their advocates says he gives them up.³ The pictures which some Popish writers have given us of them in the thirteenth century—Clemangis, for instance—we dare not transfer to our pages. The repute of their piety multiplied the number of their patrons, and swelled the stream of their benefactions. With riches came their too frequent concomitants, luxury and pride. Their vow of poverty was no barrier; for though, as individuals, they could possess no property, they might as a body corporate own any amount of wealth. Lands, houses, hunting-grounds, and forests; the tithings of tolls, of orchards, of fisheries, of kine, and wool, and cloth, formed the dowry of the monastery. The vast and miscellaneous inventory of goods which formed the common property of the fraternity, included everything that was good for food and pleasant to the eye; curious furniture for their apartments, dainty apparel for their persons; the choice treasures of the field, of the tree, and the river, for their tables; soft-paced mules by day, and luxurious couches at night. Their head, the abbot, equalled princes in wealth, and surpassed them in pride. Such, from the humble beginnings of the cell, with its bed of stone and its diet of herbs, had come to be the condition of the monastic orders long before the days of Wicliffe. From being the ornament of Christianity, they were now its opprobrium; and from being the buttress of the Church of Rome, they had now become its scandal.

We shall quote the testimony of one who was not likely to be too severe in reproving the manners of his brethren. Peter, Abbot of Cluny, thus complains: “Our brethren despise God, and having passed all shame, eat flesh now all the days of the week except Friday. They run here and there, and, as kites and vultures, fly with great swiftness where the most smoke of the kitchen is, and where they smell the best roast and boiled. Those that will not do as the rest, they mock and treat as hypocrites and profane. Beans, cheese, eggs, and even fish itself, can no more please their nice palates; they only relish the flesh-pots of Egypt. Pieces of boiled and roasted pork, good fat veal, otters and hares, the best geese and pullets, and, in a word, all sorts of flesh and fowl do now cover the tables of our holy monks. But why do I talk? Those things are grown too common, they are cloyed with them. They must have something more delicate. They would have got for them kids, harts, boars, and wild bears. One must for them beat the bushes with a great number of hunters,

² Gertrude More, *Confessions*, p.246.

³ “One great butt of Wicliffe’s sarcasm,” says Lechler, “was the monks. Once, in speaking of the prayers of the monks, he remarked, ‘a great inducement to the founding of cloisters was the delusion that the prayers of the inmates were of more value than all worldly goods, and yet it does not seem as if the prayers of those cloistered people are so mightily powered; nor can we understand why they should be so, unless God hears them for their rosy cheeks and fat lips.’” (Lechler, vol. i., p.737.)

and by the help of birds of prey must one chase the pheasants, and partridges, and ring-doves, for fear the servants of God (who are our good monks) should perish with hunger.”⁴

St. Bernard, in the twelfth century, wrote in apology for the monks of Cluny, which he addressed to William, Abbot of St. Thierry. The work was undertaken on purpose to recommend the order, and yet the author cannot restrain himself from reproving the disorders which had crept into it; and having broken ground on this field, he runs on like one who found it impossible to stop. “I can never enough admire,” says he, “how so great a licentiousness of meals, habits, beds, equipages, and horses, can get in and be established as it were among monks.” After enlarging on the sumptuousness of the apparel of the Fathers, the extent of their stud, the rich trappings of their mules, and the luxurious furniture of their chambers, St. Bernard proceeds to speak of their meals, of which he gives a very lively description. “Are not their mouths and ears,” says he, “equally filled with victuals and confused voices? And while they thus spin out their immoderate feasts, is there any one who offers to regulate the debauch? No, certainly. Dish dances after dish, and for abstinence, which they profess, two rows of fat fish appear swimming in sauce upon the table. Are you cloyed with these? the cook has art sufficient to prick you others of no less charms. Thus plate is devoured after plate, and such natural transitions are made from one to the other, that they fill their bellies, but seldom blunt their appetites. And all this,” exclaims St. Bernard, “in the name of charity, because consumed by men who had taken a vow of poverty, and must needs therefore be denominated ‘the poor.’”

From the table of the monastery, where we behold course following course in quick and bewildering succession, St. Bernard takes us next to see the pomp with which the monks ride out. “I must always take the liberty,” says he, “to inquire how the salt of the earth comes to be so depraved. What occasions men, who in their lives ought to be examples of humility, by their practice to give instructions and examples of vanity? And to pass by many other things, what a proof of humility is it to see a vast retinue of horses with their equipage, and a confused train of valets and footmen, so that the retinue of a single abbot outshines that of two bishops! May I be thought a liar if it be not true, that I have seen one single abbot attended by above sixty horse. Who could take these men for the fathers of monks, and the shepherds of souls? Or who would not be apt to take them rather for governors of cities and provinces? Why, though the master be four leagues off, must his train of equipage reach to his very doors? One would take these mighty preparations for the subsistence of an army, or for provisions to travel through a very large desert.”⁵

But this necessitated a remedy. The damage inflicted on the Papacy by the corruption and notorious profligacy of the monks must be repaired—but how? The reformation of the early orders was hopeless; but new fraternities could be called into existence. This was the method adopted. The order of Franciscans was instituted by Innocent III. in the year 1215, and the Dominicans were sanctioned by his successor Honorius III. a few years later (1218).⁶ The object of their institution was to recover, by means of their humility, poverty,

⁴ Petrus Abbas Cluniaci, lib. vi, epit. 7; *apud* Gabriel d’Emillianne, p.92.

⁵ Dupin, *Life of St. Bernard*, cent. 12, chap. 4.

⁶ Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 13, chap 10.

and apostolic zeal, the credit which had been lost to the Church through the pride, wealth, and indolence of the elder monks. Moreover, the new times on which the Church felt that she was entering, demanded new services. Preachers were needed to confute the heretics, and this was carefully kept in view in the constitution of the newly-created orders.

The founders of these two orders were very unlike in their natural disposition and temper.

St. Francis, the founder of the Franciscans, or Minorites, as they came to be termed, was born at Assisi, in Umbria, in 1182. His father was a rich merchant of that town. The historians of St. Francis relate that certain signs accompanied his birth, which prognosticated his future greatness. His mother, when her time had come, was taken in labour so severe, and her pains were prolonged for so many days, that she was on the point of death. At that crisis an angel, in the guise of a pilgrim, presented himself at her door, and demanded alms. The charity sought was instantly bestowed, and the grateful pilgrim proceeded to tell the inmates what they must do in order that the lady of the mansion might become the joyful mother of a son. They were to take up her couch, carry her out, and lay her in the stable. The pilgrim's instructions were followed, the pains of labour were now speedily ended, and thus it came to pass that the child first saw the light among the "beasts." "This was the first prerogative," remarks one of his historians, "in which St. Francis resembled Jesus Christ—he was born in a stable."⁷

Despite these auguries, betokening a more than ordinary sanctity, Francis grew up "a debauched youth," says D'Emillianne, "and, having robbed his father, was disinherited, but he seemed not to be very much troubled at it."⁸ He was seized with a malignant fever, and the frenzy that it induced appears never to have wholly left him. He lay down on his bed of sickness a gay profligate and spendthrift, and he rose up from it entirely engrossed with the idea that all holiness and virtue consisted in poverty.

He acted out his theory to the letter. He gave away all his property, he exchanged garments with a beggar whom he met on the highway; and, squalid, emaciated, covered with dirt and rags, his eyes burning with a strange fire, he wandered about the country around his native town of Assisi, followed by a crowd of boys, who hooted and jeered at the madman, which they believed him to be. Being joined by seven disciples, he made his way to Rome, to lay his project before the Pope. On arriving there he found Innocent III. airing himself on the terrace of his palace of the Lateran.

What a subject for a painter! The haughtiest of the Pontiffs—the man who, like another Jove, had but to nod and kings were tumbled from their thrones, and nations were smitten down with interdict—was pacing to and fro beneath the pillared portico of his palace revolving doubtless, new and mightier projects to illustrate the glory and strengthen the dominion of the Papal throne. At times his eye wanders as far as the Apennines, so grandly walling in the Campagna, which lies spread out beneath him—not as now, a blackened

⁷ *Storia degli Ordini Monastici, Religiosi, e Militari, &c.*, tradotto dal Franzese del P. Giuseppe Francesco Fontana Milanese, tom. vii., cap. 1, p 2; edit. Lucca, 1739, con licenza de Superiori.

⁸ Gabriel d'Emillianne, *History of Monastical Orders*, p. 158; Lond., 1693. Francesco Fontana, *Storia degli Ordini Monastici*, tom. vii., cap. 1, pp. 6, 7. Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. x., p. 71, Lond., 1814.

expanse, but a glorious garden sparkling with villas, and gay with vineyards and olive and fig trees. If in front of his palace was this goodly prospect, behind it was another, forming the obverse of that on which the Pontiff's eye now rested. A hideous gap, covered with the fragments of what had once been temples and palaces, and extending from the Lateran to the Coliseum, marred the beauty of the Pontifical city. This unsightly spectacle was the memorial of the war of Investitures, and would naturally carry the thoughts of Innocent back to the times of Hildebrand, and the fierce struggles which his zeal for the exaltation of the Papal chair had provoked in Christendom.

What a tide of prosperous fortune had flowed in upon Rome, during the century which had elapsed since Gregory VII. swayed the sceptre that Innocent now wielded! Not a Pontificate, not a decade, that had not witnessed an addition to the height of that stupendous Babel which the genius and statesmanship of all the Popes from Gregory to Innocent had been continuously and successfully occupied in rearing. And now the fabric stood complete, for higher it was hardly possible to conceive of its being carried. Rome was now more truly mistress of the world than even in the days of the Caesars. Her sway went deeper into the heart and soul of the nations. Again was she sending forth her legates, as of old her pro-consuls, to govern her subject kingdoms; again was she issuing her edicts, which all the world obeyed; again were kings and suppliant princes waiting at her gates; again were her highways crowded with ambassadors and suitors from every quarter of Christendom; from the most distant regions came the pilgrim and the devotee to pray at her holy shrines; night and day, without intermission, there flowed from her gates a spiritual stream to refresh the world; crosiers and palls, priestly offices and mystic virtues, pardons and dispensations, relics and amulets, benedictions and anathemas; and, in return for this, the tribute of all the earth was being carried into her treasuries. On these pleasurable subjects, doubtless, rested the thoughts of Innocent as Francis of Assisi drew near.

The eye of the Pontiff lights upon the strange figure. Innocent halts to survey more closely the man. His dress is that of a beggar, his looks are haggard, his eye is wild, yet despite these untoward appearances there is something about him that seems to say, "I come with a mission, and therefore do I venture into this presence. I am here not to beg, but to give alms to the Poppedom;" and few kings have had it in their power to lay greater gifts at the feet of Rome than that which this man in rags had come to bestow. Curious to know what he would say, Innocent permitted his strange visitor to address him. Francis hurriedly described his project; but the Pope failed to comprehend its importance, or to credit Francis with the power of carrying it out; he ordered the enthusiast to be gone; and Francis retired, disappointed and downcast, believing his scheme to be nipped in the bud.⁹

The incident, however, had made a deeper impression upon the Pontiff than he was aware. As he lay on his couch by night, the beggar seemed again to stand before him, and to plead his cause. A palm-tree—so Innocent thought in his sleep—suddenly sprang up at his feet, and waxed into a goodly stature. In a second dream Francis seemed to stretch out his hand to prop up the Lateran, which was menaced with overthrow.¹⁰ When the Pope

⁹ *Storia degli Ordini Monastici*, tom. vii., cap. 1, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Alb. Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. x., p. 77.

awoke, he gave orders to seek out the strange man from Umbria, and bring him before him. Convening his cardinals, he gave them an opportunity of hearing the project. To Innocent and his conclave the idea of Francis appeared to be good; and to whom, thought they, could they better commit the carrying of it out than to the enthusiast who had conceived it? To this man in rags did Rome now give her commission. Armed with the Pontifical sanction, empowering him to found, arrange, and set a-working such an order as he had sketched out, Francis now left the presence of the Pope and cardinals, and departed to begin his work.¹¹

The enthusiasm that burned so fiercely in his own brain kindled a similar enthusiasm in that of others. Soon St. Francis found a dozen men willing to share his views and take part in his project. The dozen speedily multiplied into a hundred, and the hundred into thousands, and the increase went on at a rate of which history scarcely affords another such example. Before his death, St. Francis had the satisfaction of seeing 5,000 of his monks assemble in his convent in Italy to hold a general chapter, and as each convent sent only two delegates, the convocation represented 2,500 convents.¹² The solitary fanatic had become an army; his disciples filled all the countries of Christendom; every object and idea they subordinated to that of their chief; and, bound together by their vow, they prosecuted with indefatigable zeal the service to which they had consecrated themselves. This order has had in it five Popes and forty-five cardinals.¹³

St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominicans, was born in Arragon, 1170. He was cast in a different mould from St. Francis. His enthusiasm was as fiery, his zeal as intense;¹⁴ but to these qualities he added a cool judgment, a firm will, a somewhat stern temper, and great knowledge of affairs. Dominic had witnessed the ravages of heresy in the southern provinces of France; he had also had occasion to mark the futility of those splendidly equipped missions, that Rome sent forth from time to time to convert the Albigenses. He saw that these missionaries left more heretics on their departure than they had found on their arrival. Mitred dignitaries, mounted on richly caparisoned mules, followed by a sumptuous train of priests and monks, and other attendants, too proud or too ignorant to preach, and able only to dazzle the gaze of the multitude by the magnificence of their ceremonies, attested most conclusively the wealth of Rome, but did not attest with equal conclusiveness the truth of her tenets. Instead of bishops on palfreys, Dominic called for monks in wooden soles to preach to the heretics.

Repairing to Rome, he too laid his scheme before Innocent, offering to raise an army that would perambulate Europe in the interests of the Papal See, organised after a different fashion, and that, he hoped, would be able to give a better account of the heretics. Their garb as humble, their habits as austere, and their speech as plain as those of

¹¹ Dupin, *Eccles. Hist.*, cent. 13, vol. xi., chap. 10; Lond., 1699. *Storia degli Ordini Monastici*, tom. vii., cap. 1, pp. 14, 15.

¹² *Storia degli Ordini Monastici*, tom. vii., cap. 1 p. 19. Gabriel d'Emillianne, *Hist. of Monast. Orders*, p. 171.

¹³ Alb. Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, v. 10, p. 100.

¹⁴ Gabriel d'Emillianne, *Hist. of Monast. Orders*. This author says that the mother of St. Dominic before his birth dreamed that she was brought to bed of a dog (some say a wolf) carrying a burning torch in its mouth, wherewith it set the world on fire (p. 147).

the peasants they were to address, these missionaries would soon win the heretics from the errors into which they had been seduced; and, living on alms, they would cost the Papal exchequer nothing. Innocent, for some reason or other, perhaps from having sanctioned the Franciscans so recently, refused his consent. But Pope Honorius was more compliant; he confirmed the proposed order of Dominic; and from beginnings equally small with those of the Franciscans, the growth of the Dominicans in popularity and numbers was equally rapid.¹⁵

The Dominicans were divided into two bands. The business of the one was to preach, that of the other to slay those whom the first were not able to convert.¹⁶ The one refuted heresy, the other exterminated heretics. This happy division of labour, it was thought, would secure the thorough doing of the work. The preachers rapidly multiplied, and in a few years the sound of their voices was heard in almost all the cities of Europe. Their learning was small, but their enthusiasm kindled them into eloquence, and their harangues were listened to by admiring crowds. The Franciscans and Dominicans did for the Papacy in the centuries that preceded the Reformation, what the Jesuits have done for it in the centuries that have followed it.

Before proceeding to speak of the battle which Wicliffe was called to wage with the new fraternities, it is necessary to indicate the peculiarities in their constitution and organisation that fitted them to cope with the emergencies amid which their career began, and which had made it necessary to call them into existence. The elder order of monks were recluses. They had no relation to the world which they had abandoned, and no duties to perform to it, beyond the example of austere piety which they offered for its edification. Their sphere was the cell, or the walls of the monastery, where their whole time was presumed to be spent in prayer and meditation.

The newly-created orders, on the other hand, were not confined to a particular spot. They had convents, it is true, but these were rather hotels or temporary abodes, where they might rest when on their preaching tours. Their sphere was the world; they were to perambulate provinces and cities, and to address all who were willing to listen to them. Preaching had come to be one of the lost arts. The secular or parochial clergy seldom entered a pulpit; they were too ignorant to write a sermon, too indolent to preach one even were it prepared to their hand. They instructed their flocks by a service of ceremonials, and by prayers and litanies, in a language which the people did not understand. Wicliffe assures us that in his time "there were many unable curates that knew not the ten commandments, nor could read their psalter, nor could understand a verse of it."¹⁷ The friars, on the other hand, betook themselves to their mother tongue, and, mingling familiarly with all classes of the community, they revived the forgotten practice of preaching, and plied it assiduously Sabbath and week-day. They held forth in all places,

¹⁵ Gabriel d'Emillianne, *Hist. of Monast. Orders*, p. 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* "A troop of merciless fellows, whom he [St. Dominic] maintained to cut the throats of heretics when he was a-preaching; he called them the *Militia of Jesus Christ*."

¹⁷ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 40. By a council held in Oxford, 1222, it was provided that the archdeacons in their visitations should "see that the clergy knew how to pronounce aright the form of baptism, and say the words of consecration in the canon of the mass."

as well as on all days, erecting their pulpit in the market, at the street-corner, or in the chapel.

In one point especially the friars stood out in marked and advantageous contrast to the old monastic orders. The latter were scandalously rich, the former were severely and edifyingly poor. They lived on alms, and literally were beggars hence their name of Mendicants. Christ and his apostles, it was affirmed, were mendicants; the profession, therefore, was an ancient and a holy one. The early monastic orders, it is true, equally with the Dominicans and Franciscans, had taken a vow of poverty; but the difference between the elder and the later monks lay in this, that while the former could not in their individual capacity possess property, in their corporate capacity they might and did possess it to an enormous amount; the latter, both as individuals and as a body, were disqualified by their vow from holding any property whatever. They could not so much as possess a penny in the world; and as there was nothing in their humble garb and frugal diet to belie their profession of poverty, their repute for sanctity was great, and their influence with all classes was in proportion. They seemed the very men for the times in which their lot was cast, and for the work which had been appointed them. They were emphatically the soldiers of the Pope, the household troops of the Vatican, traversing Christendom in two bands, yet forming one united army, which continually increased, and which, having no *impedimenta* to retard its march, advanced alertly and victoriously to combat heresy, and extended the fame and dominion of the Papal See.

If the rise of the Mendicant orders was unexampled in its rapidity, equally unexampled was the rapidity of their decline. The rock on which they split was the same which had proved so fatal to their predecessors—riches. But how was it possible for wealth to enter when the door of the monastery was so effectually barred by a most stringent vow of poverty? Neither as individuals nor as a corporation, could they accept or hold a penny. Nevertheless, the fact was so; their riches increased prodigiously, and their degeneracy, consequent thereon, was even more rapid than the declension which former ages had witnessed in the Benedictines and Augustinians.

The original constitution of the Mendicant orders remained unaltered, their vow of poverty still stood unrepealed; they still lived on the alms of the faithful, and still wore their gown of course woollen cloth,¹⁸ while in the case of the Dominicans, and girded with a broad sash brown in the case of the Franciscans, and tied with a cord of three knots: in both cases curiously provided with numerous and capacious pouches, in which little images, square bits of paper, amulets, and rosaries, were mixed with bits of bread and cheese, morsels of flesh, and other victuals collected by begging.¹⁹

But in the midst of all these signs of poverty, and of the professed observance of their vow, their hoards increased every day. How came this? Among the brothers were some subtle intellects, who taught them the happy distinction between *proprietors* and *stewards*.

¹⁸ Their habit or dress is described by Chaucer as consisting of a great hood, a scapleriè, a knotted girdle, and a wide cope. (*Jack Upland*.)

¹⁹ The curiously knotted cord with which they gird themselves, “they say, hath virtue to heal the sick, to chase away the devil and all dangerous temptations, and serve what turn they please.” (Gabriel d’Emillianne, *Hist. of Monast. Orders*, p. 174.)

In the character of proprietors they could possess absolutely nothing; in the character of stewards they might hold wealth to any amount, and dispense it for the ends and uses of their order.²⁰ This ingenious distinction unlocked the gates of their convents, and straightway a stream of gold, fed by the piety of their admirers, began to flow into them. They did not, like the other monastic fraternities, become landed proprietors—this kind of property not coming within the scope of that interpretation by which they had so materially qualified their vow—but in other respects they claimed a very ample freedom. The splendour of their edifices eclipsed those of the Benedictines and Augustinians. Churches which the skill of the architect and the genius of the painter did their utmost to glorify, convents and cloisters which monarchs might have been proud to inhabit,²¹ rose in all countries for the use of the friars. With this wealth came a multiform corruption—indolence, insolence, a dissolution of manners, and a grievous abuse of those vast privileges and powers which the Papal See, finding them so useful, had heaped upon them. “It is an awful presage,” exclaims Matthew Paris, only forty years after their institution, “that in 300 years, nay, in 400 years and more, the old monastic orders have not so entirely degenerated as these fraternities.”

Such was the state in which Wicliffe found the friars. Nay, we may conclude that in his time the corruption of the Mendicants far exceeded what it was in the days of Matthew Paris, a century earlier. He found in fact a plague fallen upon the kingdom, which was daily spreading and hourly intensifying its ravages. It was in 1360 that he began his public opposition to them. The Dominican friars entered England in 1321. In that year Gilbert de Fresney and twelve of his brethren settled at Oxford.²² The same causes that favoured their growth on the Continent operated equally in England, and this little band recruited their ranks so rapidly, that soon they spread their swarms over all the kingdom. Forty-three houses of the Dominicans were established in England, where, from their black cloak and hood, they were popularly termed the Black Friars.²³

Finding themselves now powerful, they attacked the laws and privileges of the University of Oxford, where they had established themselves, claiming independence of its jurisdiction. This drew on a battle between them and the college authorities. The first to oppose their encroachments was Fitzralph (Armachanus), who had been appointed to the chancellorship of Oxford in 1333, and in 1347 became Archbishop of Armagh. Fitzralph declared that under this “pestiferous canker,” as he styled mendicancy, everything that was good and fair—letters, industry, obedience, morals—was being blighted. He carried his complaints all the way to Avignon, where the Popes then lived, in the hope of effecting a

²⁰ This distinction is sanctioned by the Constitution issued by Nicholas III. in 1279, explaining and confirming the title of St. Francis. This Constitution is still extant in the *Jus. Canon.*, lib. vi., tit. xii., cap. 3, commonly called *Constitution Exiit*, from its commencing, *Exiit*, &c.

²¹ No traveller can have passed from Perugia to Terni without having had his attention called to the convent of St. Francis d’Assisi, which stands on the lower slope of the Apennines, overlooking the vale of the Clitumnus. It is in splendour a palace, and in size it is almost a little town. In this magnificent edifice is the tomb of the man who died under a borrowed cloak.

²² Vaughan, *Life of Wicliffe*, vol. i., pp. 250, 251.

²³ Sharon Turner, *Hist. of England*, vol. v., p. 101; Lond., 1830. “This order hath given to the Church 5 Popes, 48 cardinals, 23 patriarchs, 1,500 bishops, 600 archbishops, and a great number of eminent doctors and writers.” (Alban Butler.)

reformation of this crying evil. The heads of the address which he delivered before the Pontiff were as follow:—That the friars were propagating a pestiferous doctrine, subversive of the testament of Jesus Christ; that, owing to their machinations, the ministers of the Church were decreasing; that the universities were decaying; that students could not find books to carry on their studies; that the friars were recruiting their ranks by robbing and circumventing children; that they cherished ambition under a feigned humility, that they concealed riches under a simulated poverty; and crept up by subtle means to be lords, archbishops, cardinals, chancellors of kingdoms, and privy councillors of monarchs.

We must give a specimen of his pleading before the Pontiff, as Fox has preserved it. “By the privileges,” says Armachanus, “granted by the Popes to the friars, great enormities do arise.” Among other abuses, he enumerates the following:—“The true shepherds do not know the faces of their flock. Item, great convention and sometimes blows arise between the friars and the secular curates, about titles, impropriations, and other avails. Item, divers young men, as well in universities as in their fathers’ houses, are allured craftily by the friars, their confessors, to enter their orders; from whence, also, they cannot get out, though they would, to the great grief of their parents, and no less repentance to the young men themselves. No less inconvenience and danger also by the said friars riseth to the clergy, forso much as laymen, seeing their children thus to be stolen from them in the universities by the friars, do refuse therefore to send them to their studies, rather willing to keep them at home to their occupation, or to follow the plough, than so to be circumvented and defeated of their sons at the university, as by daily experience doth manifestly appear. For, whereas, in my time there were in the university of Oxford 30,000 students, now there are not to be found 6,000. The occasion of this great decay is to be ascribed to no other cause than the circumvention only of the friars above mentioned.”

As the consequence of these very extraordinary practices of the friars, every branch of science and study was decaying in England. “For that these begging friars,” continues the archbishop, “through their privileges obtained of the Popes to preach, to hear confessions, and to bury, and through their charters of impropriations, did thereby grow to such great riches and possessions by their begging, craving, catching, and intermeddling with Church matters, that no book could stir of any science, either of divinity, law, or physic, but they were both able and ready to buy it up. So that every convent having a great library, full, stuffed, and furnished with all sorts of books, and being so many convents within the realm, and in every convent so many friars increasing daily more and more, by reason thereof it came to pass that very few books or none at all remain for other students.”

“He himself sent to the university four of his own priests or chaplains, who sent him word again that they neither could find the Bible, nor any other good profitable book of divinity profitable for their study, and so they returned to their own country.”²⁴

In vain had the archbishop undertaken his long journey. In vain had he urged these complaints before the Pontiff at Avignon. The Pope knew that these charges were but too well-founded; but what did that avail? The friars were indispensable to the Pope; they had been created by him, they were dependent upon him, they lived for him, they were his obsequious tools; and weighed against the services they were rendering to the Papal

²⁴ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, bk. v. See there the story of Armachanus and his oration against the friars.

throne, the interests of literature in England were but as dust in the balance. Not a finger must be lifted to curtail the privileges or check the abuses of the Mendicants. The archbishop, finding that he had gone on a bootless errand, returned to England, and died three years after.

Chapter V.

The Friars Versus the Gospel in England.

The Joy of the Friars—Wicliffe Resumes the Battle—Demands the Abolition of the Orders—The Arrogance of the Friars—Their Luxury—Their Covetousness—Their Oppression of the Poor—The Agitation in England—Questions touching the Gospel raised thereby—Is it from the Friar or from Christ that Pardon is to be had?—Were Christ and the Apostles Mendicants?—Wicliffe’s Tractate, Objections to Friars—It launches him on his Career as a Reformer—Preaches in this Tractate the Gospel to England—Attack on the Power of the Keys—No Pardon but from God—Salvation without Money.

The joy of the friars when they heard that their enemy was dead was great; but it was of short duration. The same year in which the archbishop died (1360) Wicliffe stood up and began that opposition to the Mendicants which he maintained more or less to the very close of his life. “John Wicliffe,” says an unknown writer, “the singular ornament of his time, began at Oxford in the year of our Lord 1360, in his public lectures, to correct the abuses of the clergy, and their open wickedness, King Edward III. being living, and continued secure a most valiant champion of the truth among the tyrants of Sodom.”¹

Wicliffe saw deeper into the evil than Armachanus had done. The very institution of the order was unscriptural and corrupt, and while it existed, nothing, he felt, but abuse could flow from it; and therefore, not content, as his predecessor would have been, with the reformation of the order, he demanded its abolition. The friars, vested in an independent jurisdiction by the Pope, were overriding the canons and regulations of Oxford, where their headquarters were pitched; they were setting at defiance the laws of the State; they were inveigling young children into their “rotten habit;” they were perambulating the country; and while they would allow no one but themselves to preach, their sermons were made up, Wicliffe tells us, “of fables, chronicles of the world, and stories from the siege of Troy.”

The Pope, moreover, had conferred on them the right of shriving men; and they performed their office with such a hearty good-will, and gave absolution on terms so easy, that malefactors of every description flocked to them for pardon, and the consequence was a frightful increase of immorality and crime.² The alms which ought to have been given to the “bed-rid, the feeble, the crooked,” they intercepted and devoured. In flagrant contempt of the declared intention of their founder, and their own vow of poverty, their hoards daily increased. The wealth thus gathered they expended in palatial buildings, in sumptuous tables, or other delights, or they sent it abroad to the impoverishing of the kingdom. Not the money only, but the secrets of the nation they were suspected of discovering to the enemies of the realm. To obey the Pope, to pray to St. Francis, to give alms to the friar, were the sum of all piety. This was better than all learning and all virtue, for it could open

¹ MS. in Hyper. Bodl., 163; apud Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 9.

² “I have in my diocese of Armagh,” says the Archbishop and Primate of Ireland, Armachanus, “about 2,000 persons, who stand condemned by the censures of the Church denounced every year against murderers, thieves, and such-like malefactors, of all which number scarce fourteen have applied to me or to my clergy for absolution; yet they all receive the Sacraments, as others do, because they are absolved, or pretend to be absolved, by friars.” (Fox, *Acts and Mon.*)

the gates of heaven. Wicliffe saw nothing in the future, provided the Mendicants were permitted to carry on their trade, but the speedy ruin of both Church and State.

The controversy on which Wicliffe now entered was eminently wholesome—wholesome to himself and to the nation. It touched the very foundations of Christianity, and compelled men to study the nature of the Gospel. The Mendicants went through England, selling to men the pardons of the Pope. Can our sins be forgiven for a little money? men were led to ask. Is it with Innocent or with God that we have to do? This led them to the Gospel, to learn from it the ground of the acceptance of sinners before God. Thus the controversy was no mere quarrel between the regulars and the seculars; it was no mere collision between the jurisdiction of the Oxford authorities and the jurisdiction of the Mendicants; the question was one between the Mendicants and the Gospel. Is it from the friars or from Jesus Christ that we are to obtain the forgiveness of our sins? This was a question which the England of that age eminently needed to have stirred.

The arguments, too, by which the friars endeavoured to cover the lucrative trade they were driving, helped to import a salutary element into the controversy. They pleaded the sanction of the Saviour for their begging. Christ and the apostles, said they, were mendicants, and lived on alms.³ This led men to look into the New Testament, to see if this really were so. The friars had made an unwitting appeal to the right of private judgment, and advertised a book about which, had they been wise for their own interests, they would have been profoundly silent. Wicliffe, especially, was led to the yet closer study of the Bible. The system of truth in Holy Scripture revealed itself more and more to him; he saw how widely the Church of Rome had departed from the Gospel of Christ, and what a gulf separated salvation by the blood of the Lamb from salvation by the pardons of the Pope. It was now that the Professor of Divinity in Oxford rose up into the Reformer of England—the great pioneer and founder of the Reformation of Christendom.

About this time he published his *Objections to Friars*, which fairly launched him on his career as a Reformer. In this tractate he charges the friars with “fifty heresies and errors, and many more, if men wole seke them well out.”⁴ Let us mark that in this tract the Reformer does not so much dispute with the friars as preach the Gospel to his countrymen. “There cometh,” says Wicliffe, “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 clear 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 this 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 all 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

³ Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 283.

⁴ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 22.

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.”

“I confess that the indulgences of the Pope, if they are what they are said to be, are a manifest blasphemy. The friars give a colour to this blasphemy by saying that Christ is omnipotent, and that the Pope is his plenary vicar, and so possesses in everything the same power as Christ in his humanity. Against this rude blasphemy I have elsewhere inveighed. Neither the Pope nor the Lord Jesus Christ can grant dispensations or give indulgences to any man, except as the Deity has eternally determined by His just counsel.”⁵

Thus did John Wicliffe, with the instincts of a true Reformer, strike at that ghostly principle which serves the Pope as the foundation-stone of his kingdom. Luther’s first blows were in like manner aimed at the same principle. He began his career by throwing down the gauntlet to the pardon-mongers of Rome. It was “the power of the keys” which gave to the Pope the lordship of the conscience; for he who can pardon sin—open or shut the gate of Paradise—is God to men. Wicliffe perceived that he could not shake into ruin that great fabric of spiritual and temporal power which the Pontiffs had reared, and in which, as within a vast prison-house they kept immured the souls and bodies of men, otherwise than by exploding the false dogma on which it was founded. It was this dogma therefore, first of all, which he challenged. Think not, said he, in effect, to his countrymen, that God has given “the keys” to Innocent of Rome; think not that the friar carries heaven in his wallet; think not that God sends his pardons wrapped up in those bits of paper which the Mendicants carry about with them, and which they sell for a piece of silver. Listen to the voice of the Gospel: “Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb without blemish and without spot. God pardons men without money and without price. Thus did Wicliffe begin to preach “the acceptable year of the Lord,” and to proclaim “liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

⁵ See Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 2. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*. Also *Wicliffe and the Huguenots*, by the Rev. Dr. Hauna, pp. 61—63; Edins., 1860.

Chapter VI

The Battle of the Parliament with the Pope.

Resumé of Political Progress—Foreign Ecclesiastics appointed to English Benefices—Statutes of Provisors and Praemunire meant to put an End to the Abuse—The Practice still Continued—Instances—Royal Commissioners sent to Treat with the Pope concerning this Abuse—Wicliffe chosen one of the Commissioners—The Negotiation a Failure—Nevertheless of Benefit to Wicliffe by the Insight it gave him into the Papacy—Arnold Garnier—The “Good Parliament”—Its Battle with the Pope—A Greater Victory than Crecy—Wicliffe waxes Bolder—Rage of the Monks.

We have already spoken of the encroachments of the Papal See on the independence of England in the thirteenth century; the cession of the kingdom to Innocent III. by King John; the promise of an annual payment to the Pope of a thousand marks by the English king; the demand preferred by Urban V. after payment of this tribute had lapsed for thirty years; the spirited reply of the Parliament of England, and the share Wicliffe had in the resolution to which the Lords temporal and spiritual came to refuse the Papal impost. We have also said that the opposition of Parliament to the encroachments of the Popes on the liberties of the kingdom did not stop at this point, that several stringent laws were passed to protect the rights of the crown and the property of the subjects, and that more especially the Statutes of Provisors and Praemunire were framed with this view. The abuses which these laws were meant to correct had long been a source of national irritation. There were certain benefices in England which the Pope, in the plenitude of his power, reserved to himself. These were generally the more wealthy livings. But it might be inconvenient to wait till a vacancy actually occurred, accordingly the Pope, by what he termed a *provisor*, issued an appointment beforehand. The rights, of the chapter, or of the crown, or whoever was patron, were thus set aside, and the legal presentee must either buy up the provisor, or permit the Pope's nominee, often a foreigner, to enjoy the benefice. The very best of these dignities and benefices were enjoyed by Italians, Frenchmen, and other foreigners, who were, says Lewis, “some of them mere boys; and not only ignorant of the English language, but even of Latin, and who never so much as saw their churches, but committed the care of them to those they could get to serve them the cheapest; and had the revenues of them remitted to them at Rome or elsewhere, by their proctors, to whom they let their tithes.”¹ It was to check this abuse that the Statute of Provisors was passed; and the law of Praemunire, by which it was followed, was intended to fortify it, and effectually to close the drain of the nation's wealth by forbidding any one to bring into the kingdom any bull or letter of the Pope appointing to an English benefice.

The grievances were continued nevertheless, and became even more intolerable. The Parliament addressed a new remonstrance to the king, setting forth the unbearable nature of these oppressions, and the injury they were doing to the royal authority, and preying him to take action on the point. Accordingly, in 1373, the king appointed four commissioners to proceed to Avignon, where Pope Gregory XI. was residing, and laying the complaints of the English nation before him, request that for the future he would

¹ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 3, p. 31.

forbear meddling with the reservations of benefices. The ambassadors were courteously received, but they could obtain no redress.² The Parliament renewed their complaint and request that “remedy be provided against the provisions of the Pope, whereby he reaps the first-fruits of ecclesiastical dignities, the treasure of the realm being thereby conveyed away, which they cannot bear.” A Royal Commission was issued in 1374 to inquire into the number of ecclesiastical benefices and dignities in England held by aliens, and to estimate their exact value. It was found that the number of livings in the hands of Italians, Frenchmen, and other foreigners was so great that, says Fox, “were it all set down, it would fill almost half a quire of paper.”³ The clergy of England was rapidly becoming an alien and a merely nominal one. The sums drained from the kingdom were immense.

The king resolved to make another attempt to arrange this matter with the Papal court. He named another commission, and it is an evidence of the growing influence of Wicliffe that his name stands second on the list of these delegates. The first named is John, Bishop of Bangor, who had served on the former commission; the second is John de Wicliffe, S.T.P. The names that follow are John Guter, Dean of Sechow; Simon de Moulton, LL.D.; William de Burton, Knight; Robert Bealknap, and John de Henyngton.⁴

The Pope declined receiving the king’s ambassadors at Avignon. The manners of the Papal court in that age could not bear close inspection. It was safer that foreign eyes should contemplate them from a distance. The Pope made choice of Bruges, in the Netherlands, and thither he sent his nuncios to confer with the English delegates.⁵ The negotiation dragged on for two years: the result was a compromise; the Pope engaging on his part, to desist from the reservation of benefices; and the king promising, on his, no more to confer them by his writ “quare impedit.” This arrangement left the power of the Pope over the benefices of the Church of England at least equal to that of the sovereign. The Pope did not renounce his right, he simply abstained from the exercise of it—tactics exceedingly common and very convenient in the Papal policy—and this was all that could be obtained from a negotiation of two years. The result satisfied no one in England: it was seen to be a hollow truce that could not last; nor indeed did it, for hardly had the commissioners returned home, when the Pope began to make as free with English benefices and their revenues, as though he had never tied his hands by promise or treaty.⁶

There is cause, indeed, to suspect that the interests of England were betrayed in this negotiation. The Bishop of Bangor, on whom the conduct of the embassy chiefly devolved, on his return home was immediately translated to the See of Hereford, and in 1389 to that of St. David’s. His promotion, in both instances the result of Papal provisors, bore the appearance of being the reward of subserviency. Wicliffe returned home in disgust at the time which had been wasted, and the little fruit which had been obtained. But these two years were to him far from lost years. Wicliffe had come into

² Barnes, *Life of King Edward III.*, p. 864. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 32.

³ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 561. Fox gives a list of the benefices, with the names of the incumbents and the worth of their sees. (See pp. 561, 562.)

⁴ Barnes, *Life of King Edward III.*, p. 866. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 33.

⁵ Bruges was then a large city of 200,000 inhabitants, the seat of important industries, trade, wealth, municipal freedom, and political power.

⁶ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 34. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. i., pp. 326, 327.

communication with the Italian, Spanish, and French dignitaries of the Church, who enjoyed the confidence of the Pope and the cardinals. There was given him an insight into a circle which would not have readily opened to his view in his own country. Other lessons too he had been learning, unpleasant no doubt, but most important. He had not been so far removed from the Papal court but he could see the principles that reigned there, and the motives that guided its policy. If he had not met the Pope he had met his representatives, and he had been able to read the master in his servants; and when he returned to England it was to proclaim on the house-tops what before he had spoken in the closet. Avarice, ambition, hypocrisy, these were the gods that were worshipped in the Roman curia—these were the virtues that adorned the Papal throne. So did Wicliffe proclaim. In his public lectures he now spoke of the Pope as “Antichrist, the proud worldly priest of Rome, and the most cursed of clippers and purse-kervers.” And in one of his tracts that remain he thus speaks:—“They [The Pope and his collectors] draw out of our land poor men’s livelihood, and many thousand marks by the year, of the king’s money, for Sacraments and spiritual things, that is cursed heresie of simony, and maketh all Christendom assent and meyntene his heresie. And certes though our realm had a huge hill of gold, and never other man took thereof but only this proud worldly priest’s collector, by process of time this hill must be spende; for he taketh ever money out of our land, and sendeth nought agen but God’s curse for his simony.”⁷ Soon after his return from Bruges, Wicliffe was appointed to the rectorship of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, and as this preferment came not from the Pope but the king, it may be taken as a sign of the royal approval of his conduct as a commissioner, and his growing influence at the court.

The Parliament, finding that the negotiation at Bruges had come to nothing, resolved on more decisive measures. The Pope took advantage of the king’s remissness in enforcing the statutes directed against the Papal encroachments, and promised many things, but performed nothing. He still continued to appoint aliens to English livings, notwithstanding his treaties to the contrary. If these usurpations were allowed, he would soon proceed to greater liberties, and would appoint to secular dignities also, and end by appropriating as his own the sovereignty of the realm. It was plain to the Parliament that a battle must be fought for the country’s independence, and there were none but themselves to front it. They drew up a bill of indictment against the Papal usurpations. In that document they set forth the manifold miseries under which the country was groaning from a foreign tyranny, which had crept into the kingdom under spiritual pretexts, but which was rapaciously consuming the fruits of the earth and the goods of the nation. The Parliament went on to say that the revenue drawn by the Pope from the realm was five times that which the king received; that he contrived to make one and the same dignity yield him six several taxes; that to increase his gains he frequently shifted bishops from one see to another; that he filled livings with ignorant and unworthy persons, while meritorious Englishmen were passed over, to the great discouragement of learning and virtue; that everything was venal in “the sinful city of Rome;” and that English patrons, corrupted by this pestilential example, had learned to practise simony without shame or remorse; that the Pope’s collector had opened an establishment in the capital with a staff of officers, as if it were one of the great courts of the nation, “transporting yearly to the Pope twenty

⁷ *Great Sentence of Curse Expounded*, c. 21; MSS. *apud* Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*.

thousand marks, and most commonly more;” that the Pope received a richer revenue from England than any prince in Christendom drew from his kingdom; that this very year he had taken the first-fruits of all benefices; that he often imposed a special tax upon the clergy, which he sometimes expended in subsidising the enemies of the country; that “God hath given his sheep to the Pope to be pastured, and not shorn and shaven;” that “therefore it would be good to renew all the statutes against provisions from Rome,” and that “no Papal collector or proctor should remain in England, upon pain of life and limb; and that no Englishman, on the like pain, should become such collector or proctor, or remain at the court of Rome.”⁸

In February, 1372, there appeared in England an agent of the Pope, named Arnold Garnier, who travelled with a suite of servants and six horses through England, and after remaining uninterruptedly two and a half years in the country, went back to Rome with no inconsiderable sum of money. He had a royal licence to return to England, of which he afterwards made use. He was required to swear that in collecting the Papal dues he would protect the rights and interests of the crown and the country. He took the oath in 1372 in the Palace of Westminster, in presence of the councillors and dignitaries of the crown. The fears of patriots were in no way allayed by the ready oath of the Papal agent; and Wicliffe in especial wrote a treatise to show that he had sworn to do what was a contradiction and an impossibility.⁹ It was Wicliffe who breathed this spirit into the Commons of England, and emboldened them to fight this battle for the prerogatives of their prince, and their own rights as the free subjects of an independent realm. We recognise his graphic and trenchant style in the document of the Parliament. The Pope stormed when he found the gage of battle thrown down in this bold fashion. With an air of defiance he hastened to take it up, by appointing an Italian to an English benefice. But the Parliament stood firm; the temporal Lords sided with the Commons. “We will support the crown,” said they, “against the tiara.” The Lords spiritual adopted a like course; reserving their judgment on the ecclesiastical sentences of the Pope, they held that the temporal effects of his sentences were null, and that the Papal power availed nothing in that point against the royal prerogative.

The nation rallied in support of the Estates of the Realm. It pronounced no equivocal opinion when it styled the Parliament which had enacted these stringent edicts against the Papal bulls and agents “the Good Parliament.” The Pope languidly maintained the conflict for a few years, but he was compelled ultimately to give way before the firm attitude of the nation. The statutes no longer remained a dead letter. They were enforced against every attempt to carry out the Papal appointments in England. Thus were the prerogatives of the sovereign and the independence of the country vindicated, and a victory achieved more truly valuable in itself, and more lasting in its consequences, than the renowned triumphs of Crecy and Poitiers, which rendered illustrious the same age and the same reign.

This was the second great defeat which Rome had sustained. England had refused to be a fief of the Papal See by withholding the tribute to Urban; and now, by repelling the

⁸ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 561. Sir Robert Cotton’s Abridgment, p. 128. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, pp. 34-37. Hume, *Edw. III.*, chap. 16.

⁹ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*; MSS. in the Royal Library at Vienna, No. 1,337; vol. i., p. 341.

Pontifical jurisdiction, she claimed to be mistress in her own territory. The clergy divined the quarter whence these rebuffs proceeded. The real author of this movement, which was expanding every day, was at little pains to conceal himself. Ever since his return from Bruges, Wicliffe had felt a new power in his soul propelling him onward in this war. The unscriptural constitution and blasphemous assumptions of the Papacy had been more fully disclosed to him, and he began to oppose it with a boldness, an eloquence, and a force of argument which he had not till now been able to wield. Through many channels was he leavening the nation—his chair in Oxford; his pulpit in Lutterworth; the Parliament, whose debates and edicts he inspired; and the court, whose policy he partly moulded. His sentiments were finding an echo in public opinion. The tide was rising. The hierarchy took the alarm. They cried for help, and the Pope espoused their cause, which was not theirs only, but his as well. “The whole glut of monks or begging friars,” says Fox, “were set in a rage or madness, which (even as hornets with their stings) did assail this good man on every side, fighting, (as is said) for their altars, paunches, and bellies. After them the priests, and then after them the archbishop took the matter in hand, being then Simon Sudbury.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i. p. 556.

Chapter VII.

Persecution of Wicliffe by the Pope and the Hierarchy.

Wicliffe's Writings Examined—His Teaching submitted to the Pope—Three Bulls issued against him—Cited to appear before the Bishop of London—John of Gaunt Accompanies him—Portrait of Wicliffe before his Judges—Tumult—Altercation between Duke of Lancaster and Bishop of London—The Mob Rushes in—The Court Broken up—Death of Edward III.—Meeting of Parliament—Wicliffe Summoned to its Councils—Question touching the Papal Revenue from English Sees submitted to him—Its Solution—England coming out of the House of Bondage.

The man who was the mainspring of a movement so formidable to the Papacy must be struck down. The writings of Wicliffe were examined. It was no difficult matter to extract from his works doctrines which militated against the power and wealth of Rome. The Oxford professor had taught that the Pope has no more power than ordinary priests to excommunicate or absolve men; that neither Bishop nor Pope can validly excommunicate any man, unless by sin he has first made himself obnoxious to God; that princes cannot give endowments in perpetuity to the Church; that when their gifts are abused they have the right to recall them; and that Christ has given no temporal lordship to the Popes, and no supremacy over kings. These propositions, culled from the tracts of the Reformer, were sent to Pope Gregory XI.¹

These doctrines were found to be of peculiarly bad odour at the Papal court. They struck at a branch of the Pontifical prerogative on which the holders of the tiara have always put a special value. If the world should come to be of Wicliffe's sentiments, farewell to the temporal power of the Popes, the better half of their kingdom. The matter portended a terrible disaster to Rome, unless prevented in time. For broaching a similar doctrine, Arnold of Brescia had done expiation amid the flames. Wicliffe had been too long neglected; he must be immediately attended to.

Three separate bulls were drafted on the same day, May 22nd, 1377,² and dispatched to England. These bulls hinted surprise at the supineness of the English clergy in not having ere now crushed this formidable heresy which was springing up on their soil, and they commanded them no longer to delay, but to take immediate steps for silencing the author of that heresy. One of the bulls was addressed to Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, and William Courtenay, Bishop of London; the second was addressed to the king, and the third to the University of Oxford. They were all of the same tenor. The one addressed to the king dwelt on the greatness of England, "as glorious in power and richness, but more illustrious for the piety of its faith, and for its using to shine with the brightness of the sacred page."³ The Scriptures had not yet been translated into the vernacular tongue, and the Papal compliment which turns on this point is scarcely intelligible.

¹ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 557. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, pp. 46-48. Wicliffe's adversaries sent nineteen articles enclosed in a letter to the Pope, extracted from his letters and sermons. See in Lewis the copy which Sir Henry Spelman has put in his collation of the English Councils.

² Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 49.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The university was commanded to take care that tares did not spring up among its wheat, and that from its chairs propositions were not taught “detestable and damnable, tending to subvert the state of the whole Church, and even of the civil government.” The bull addressed to the bishops was expressed in terms still more energetic. The Pope could not help wishing that the Rector of Lutterworth and Professor of Divinity “was not a master of errors, and had run into a kind of detestable wickedness, not only and openly publishing, but also vomiting out of the filthy dungeon of his breast divers professions, false and erroneous conclusions, and most wicked and damnable heresies, whereby he might defile the faithful sort, and bring them from the right path headlong into the way of perdition.” They were therefore to apprehend the said John Wicliffe, to shut him up in prison, to send all proofs and evidence of his heresy to the Pope, taking care that the document was securely sealed, and entrusted to a faithful messenger, and that meanwhile they should retain the prisoner in safe custody, and await further instructions. Thus did Pope Gregory throw the wolf’s hide over Wicliffe, that he might let slip his Dominicans in full cry upon his track.⁴

The zeal of the bishops anticipated the orders of the Pope. Before the bulls had arrived in England the prosecution of Wicliffe was begun. At the instance of Courtenay, Bishop of London, Wicliffe was cited to appear on the 19th of February, 1377, in Our Lady’s Chapel in St. Paul’s, to answer for his teaching. The rumour of what was going on got wind in London, and when the day came a great crowd assembled at the door of St. Paul’s. Wicliffe, attended by two powerful friends—John, Duke of Lancaster, better known as John of Gaunt, and Lord Percy, Earl Marshal of England—appeared at the skirts of the assemblage. The Duke of Lancaster and Wicliffe had first met, it is probable, at Bruges, where it chanced to both to be on a mission at the same time. Lancaster held the Reformer in high esteem, on political if not on religious grounds. Favouring his opinions, he resolved to go with him and show him countenance before the tribunal of the bishops. “Here stood Wicliffe in the presence of his judges, a meager form dressed in a long light mantle of black cloth, similar to those worn at this day by doctors, masters, and students in Cambridge and Oxford, with a girdle round the middle; his face adorned with a long thick beard, showed sharp bold features, a clear piercing eye, firmly closed lips, which bespoke decision; his whole appearance full of great earnestness, significance, and character.”⁵

But the three friends had found it no easy matter to elbow their way through the crowd. In forcing a passage something like an uproar took place, which scandalised the court. Percy was the first to make his way into the Chapel of Our Lady, where the clerical judges were assembled in their robes and insignia of office.

“Percy,” said Bishop Courtenay, sharply—more offended, it is probable, at seeing the humble Rector of Lutterworth so powerfully befriended, than at the tumult which their

⁴ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 563. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, pp. 50, 51.

⁵ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 370. In 1851 a remarkable portrait of Wicliffe came to light in possession a family named Payne, in Leicester. It is a sort of palimpsest. The original painting of Wicliffe, which seems to have come down from the fifteenth century, had been painted over before the Reformation, and changed into the portrait of an unknown Dr. Robert Langton; the original was discovered beneath it, and this represents Wicliffe in somewhat earlier years, with fuller and stronger features than in the other and commonly known portraits. (*British Quarterly Review*, Oct., 1858.)

entrance had created—“if I had known what masteries you would have kept in the church, I would have stopped you from coming in hither.”

“He shall keep such masteries,” said John of Gaunt, gruffly, “though you say nay.”

“Sit down, Wicliffe,” said Percy, having but scant reverence for a court which owed its authority to a foreign power—“sit down; you have many things to answer to, and have need to repose yourself on a soft seat.”

“He must and shall stand,” said Courtenay, still more chafed; “it is unreasonable that one on his trial before his ordinary should sit.”

“Lord Percy’s proposal is but reasonable,” interposed the Duke of Lancaster; “and as for you,” said he, addressing Bishop Courtenay, “who are grown so arrogant and proud, I will bring down the pride not of you alone, but that of all the prelacy in England.”

To this menace the bishop calmly replied “that his trust was in no friend on earth, but in God.” This answer but the more inflamed the anger of the duke, and the altercation became yet warmer, till at last John of Gaunt was heard to say that “rather than take such words from the bishop, he would drag him out of the court by the hair of the head.”

It is hard to say what the strife between the duke and the bishop might have grown to, had not other parties suddenly appeared upon the scene. The crowd at the door, hearing what was going on within, burst the barrier, and precipitated itself *en masse* into the chapel. The angry contention between Lancaster and Courtenay was instantly drowned by the louder clamours of the mob. All was now confusion and uproar. The bishops had pictured to themselves the humble Rector of Lutterworth standing meekly if not tremblingly at their bar. It was their turn to tremble. Their citation, like a dangerous spell which recoils upon the man who uses it, had evoked a tempest which all their art and authority were not able to allay. To proceed with the trial was out of the question. The bishops hastily retreated; Wicliffe returned home; “and so,” says one, “that council, being broken up with scolding and brawling, was dissolved before nine o’clock.”⁶

The issues of the affair were favourable to the Reformation. The hierarchy had received a check, and the cause of Wicliffe began to be more widely discussed and better understood by the nation. At this juncture events happened in high places which tended to shield the Reformer and his opinions. Edward III. who had reigned with glory, but lived too long for his fame, now died (June 21st, 1377). His yet more renowned son, the Black Prince, had preceded him to the grave, leaving as heir to the throne a child of eleven years, who succeeded on his grandfather’s death, under the title of Richard II. His mother, the dowager Princess of Wales, was a woman of spirit, friendly to the sentiments of Wicliffe, and not afraid, as we shall see, to avow them. The new sovereign, two months after his accession, assembled his first Parliament. It was composed of nearly the same men as the “Good Parliament” which had passed such stringent edicts against the “provisions” and other usurpations of the Pope. The new Parliament was disposed to carry the war against the Papacy a step farther than its predecessor had done. It summoned Wicliffe to its councils. His influence was plainly growing. The trusted commissioner of princes, the

⁶ Fox, *Acts and Mon.* Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, pp. 56-58. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. i., pp. 338, 839. Hanna, *Wicliffe and the Huguenots*, p. 83. Hume, Rich. II., *Miscell. Trans.*

counsellor of Parliaments, he had become a power in England. We do not wonder that the Pope singled him out as the man to be struck down.

While the bulls which were meant to crush the Reformer were still on their way to England, the Parliament unequivocally showed the confidence it had in his wisdom and integrity, by submitting the following question to him: "Whether the Kingdom of England might not lawfully, in case of necessity, detain and keep back the treasure of the Kingdom for its defence, that it be not carried away to foreign and strange nations, the Pope himself demanding and requiring the same, under pain of censure."

This appears a very plain matter to us, but our ancestors of the fourteenth century found it encompassed with great difficulties. The best and bravest of England at that day were scared by the ghostly threat with which the Pope accompanied his demand, and they durst not refuse it till assured by Wicliffe that it was a matter in which the Pope had no right to command, and in which they incurred no sin and no danger by disobedience. Nothing could better show the thralldom in which our fathers were held, and the slow and laborious steps by which they found their way out of the house of their bondage.

But out of what matter did the question now put to Wicliffe arise? It related to an affair which must have been peculiarly irritating to Englishmen. The Popes were then enduring their "Babylonish captivity," as they called their residence at Avignon. All through the reign of Edward III., the Papacy, banished from Rome, had made its abode on the banks of the Rhone. One result of this was that each time the Papal chair became vacant it was filled with a Frenchman. The sympathies of this French Pope were, of course, with his native country, in the war now waging between France and England, and it was natural to suppose that part at least of the treasure which the Popes received from England went to the support of the war on the French side. Not only was the country drained of its wealth, but that wealth was turned against the country from which it was taken. Should this be longer endured? It was generally believed that at that moment the Pope's collectors had a large sum in their hands ready to send to Avignon, to be employed, like that sent already to the same quarter, in paying soldiers to fight against England. Had they not better keep this gold at home? Wicliffe's reply was in the affirmative, and the grounds of his opinion were briefly and plainly stated. He did not argue the point on the canon law, or on the law of England, but on that of nature and the Bible. God, he said, had given to every society the power of self-preservation; and any power given by God to any society or nation may, without doubt, be used for the end for which it was given. This gold was England's own, and might unquestionably be retained for England's use and defence. But it might be objected, Was not the Pope, as God's vice-regent, supreme proprietor of all the temporalities, of all the sees and religious corporations in Christendom? It was on the ground of his temporal supremacy that he demanded that money, and challenged England at its peril to retain it. But who, replied the Reformer, gave the Pope this temporal supremacy? I do not find it in the Bible. The Apostle Peter could give the Pope only what he himself possessed, and Peter possessed no temporal lordship. The Pope, argued Wicliffe, must choose between the apostleship and the kingship; if he prefers to be a king, then he can claim nothing of us in the character of an apostle; or should he abide by his apostleship, even then he cannot claim this money, for neither Peter nor any one of the apostles ever imposed a tax upon Christians; they were supported by the free-will

offerings of those to whom they ministered. What England gave to the Papacy she gave not as a tribute, but as alms. But alms could not be righteously demanded unless when the claimant was necessitous. Was the Papacy so? Were not its coffers overflowing? Was not England the poorer of the two? Her necessities were great, occasioned by a two-fold drain, the exactions of the Popes and the burdens of the war. Let charity, then, begin at home, and let England, instead of sending her money to these poor men of Avignon, who are clothed in purple and fare sumptuously every day, keep her own gold for her own uses. Thus did the Reformer lead on his countrymen step by step, as they were able to follow.

Chapter VIII.

Hierarchical Persecution of Wicliffe Resumed.

Arrival of the Three Bulls—Wicliffe's Anti-Papal Policy—Entirely Subversive of Romanism—New Citation—Appears before the Bishops at Lambeth—The Crowd—Its Reverent Behaviour to Wicliffe—Message from the Queen—Dowager to the Court—Dismay of the Bishops—They abruptly Terminate the Sitting—English Tumults in the Fourteenth Century compared with French Revolutions in the Nineteenth—Substance of Wicliffe's Defence—The Binding and Loosing Power.

Meanwhile, the three bulls of the Pope had arrived in England. The one addressed to the king found Edward in his grave. That sent to the university was but coldly welcomed. Not in vain had Wicliffe taught so many years in its halls. Oxford, moreover, had too great a regard for its own fame to extinguish the brightest luminary it contained. But the bull addressed to the bishops found them in a different mood. Alarm and rage possessed these prelates. Mainly by the instrumentality of Wicliffe had England been rescued from sheer vassalage to the Papal See. It was he, too, who had put an extinguisher upon the Papal nominations, thereby vindicating the independence of the English Church. He had next defended the right of the nation to dispose of its own property, in defiance of the ghostly terrors by which the Popes strove to divert it into their own coffers. Thus, guided by his counsel, and fortified by the sanction of his name, the Parliament was marching on and adopting one bold measure after another. The penetrating genius of the man, his sterling uprightness, his cool, cautious, yet fearless courage, made the humble Rector of Lutterworth a formidable antagonist. Besides, his deep insight into the Papal system enabled him to lead the Parliament and nation of England, so that they were being drawn on unawares to deny not merely the temporal claims, but the spiritual authority also of Rome. The acts of resistance which had been offered to the Papal power were ostensibly limited to the political sphere, but they were done on principles which impinged on the spiritual authority, and could have no other issue than the total overthrow of the whole fabric of the Roman power in England. This was what the hierarchy foresaw; the arrival of the Papal bulls, therefore, was hailed by them with delight, and they lost no time in acting upon them.

The primate summoned Wicliffe to appear before him in April, 1378. The court was to sit in the archbishop's chapel at Lambeth. The substance of the Papal bulls on which the prelates acted we have given in the preceding chapter. Following in the steps of condemned heresiarchs of ancient times, Wicliffe (said the Papal missive) had not only revived their errors, but had added new ones of his own, and was to be dealt with as men deal with a "common thief." The latter injunction the prelates judged it prudent not to obey. It might be safe enough to issue such an order at Avignon, or at Rome, but not quite so safe to attempt to execute it in England. The friends of the Reformer, embracing all ranks from the prince downward, were now too numerous to see with unconcern Wicliffe seized and incarcerated as an ordinary caitiff. The prelates, therefore, were content to cite him before them, in the hope that this would lead, in regular course, to the dungeon in which they wished to see him immured. When the day came, a crowd quite as great and more friendly to the Reformer than that which besieged the doors of St. Paul's on

occasion of his first appearance, surrounded the palace of Lambeth, on the right bank of the Thames, opposite Westminster, where several councils had been held since the times of Anselm of Canterbury. Wicliffe now stood high in popular favour as a patriot, although his claims as a theologian and Reformer were not yet acknowledged, or indeed understood. Hence this popular demonstration in his favour.

To the primate this concourse gave anything but an assuring augury of a quiet termination to the trial. But Sudbury had gone too far to retreat. Wicliffe presented himself, but this time no John of Gaunt was by his side. The controversy was now passing out of the political into the spiritual sphere, where the stout and valorous baron, having a salutary dread of heresy, and especially of the penalties thereunto annexed, feared to follow. God was training His servant to walk alone, or rather to lean only upon Himself. But at the gates of Lambeth, Wicliffe saw enough to convince him that if the barons were forsaking him, the people were coming to his side. The crowd opened reverently to permit him to pass in, and the citizens, pressing in after him, filled the chapel, and testified, by gestures and speeches more energetic than courtly, their adherence to the cause, and their determination to stand by its champion. It seemed as if every citation of Wicliffe was destined to evoke a tempest around the judgment-seat. The primate and his peers were consulting how they might eject or silence the intruders, when a messenger entered, who added to their consternation. This was Sir Lewis Clifford, who had been dispatched by the queen-mother to forbid the bishops passing sentence upon the Reformer. The dismay of the prelates was complete, and the proceedings were instantly stopped. "At the wind of a reed shaken," says Walsingham, who describes the scene, "their speech became as soft as oil, to the public loss of their own dignity, and the damage of the whole Church. They were struck with such a dread, that you would think them to be as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs."¹ The only calm and self-possessed man in all that assembly was Wicliffe. A second time he returned unhurt and uncondemned from the tribunal of his powerful enemies. He had been snatched up and carried away, as it were, by a whirlwind.

A formidable list of charges had been handed to Wicliffe along with his citation. It were tedious to enumerate these; nor is it necessary to go with any minuteness into the specific replies which he had prepared, and was about to read before the court when the storm broke over it, which brought its proceedings so abruptly to a close. But the substance of his defence it is important to note, because it enables us to measure the progress of the Reformer's own emancipation: and the stages of Wicliffe's enlightenment are just the stages of the Reformation. We now stand beside the cradle of Protestantism in England, and we behold the nation, roused from its deep sleep by the Reformer's voice, making its first essay to find the road of liberty. If a little noise accompanies these efforts, if crowds assemble, and raise fanatical cries, and scare prelates on the judgment-seat, this rudeness must be laid at the door of those who had withheld that instruction which would have taught the people to reform religion without violating the laws, and to utter their condemnation of falsehoods without indulging their passions against persons. Would it have been better that England should have lain still in her chains, than that she should disturb the repose of dignified ecclesiastics by her efforts to break them? There may be

¹ Walsingham, *Hist. Angliae*, p. 205.

some who would have preferred the torpor of slavery. But, after all, how harmless the tumults which accompanied the awakening of the English people in the fourteenth century, compared with the tragedies, the revolutions, the massacres, and the wars, amid which we have seen nations since—which slept on while England awoke—inaugurate their liberties!² The paper handed in by Wicliffe to his judges, stripped of its scholastic form—for after the manner of the schools it begins with a few axioms, runs out in numerous divisions, and reaches its conclusions through a long series of nice disquisitions and distinctions—is in substance as follows:—That the Popes have no political dominion, and that their kingdom is one of a spiritual sort only; that their spiritual authority is not absolute, so as that they may be judged of none but God; on the contrary, the Pope may fall into sin like other men, and when he does so he ought to be reprov'd, and brought back to the path of duty by his cardinals; and if they are remiss in calling him to account, the inferior clergy and even the laity “may medicinally reprove him and implead him, and reduce him to lead a better life;” that the Pope has no supremacy over the temporal possessions of the clergy and the religious houses, in which some priests have vested him, the better to evade the taxes and burdens which their sovereign for the necessities of the State imposes upon their temporalities; that no priest is at liberty to enforce temporal demands by spiritual censures; that the power of the priest in absolving or condemning is purely ministerial; that absolution will profit no one unless along with it there comes the pardon of God, nor will excommunication hurt anyone unless by sin he has exposed himself to the anger of the great Judge.³

This last is a point on which Wicliffe often insists; it goes very deep, striking as it does at one of the main pillars on which the Pope’s kingdom stands, and plucking from his grasp that terrible trident which enables him to govern the world—the power of anathema. On this important point, “the power of the keys,” as it has been technically designated, the sum of what Wicliffe taught is expressed in his fourteenth article. “We ought,” says he, “to believe that then only does a Christian priest bind or loose, when he simply obeys the law of Christ; because it is not lawful for him to bind or loose but in virtue of that law, and by consequence not unless it be in conformity to it.”⁴

Could Wicliffe have dispelled the belief in the Pope’s binding and loosing power, he would have completely rent the fetters which enchained the conscience of his nation. Knowing that the better half of his country’s slavery lay in the thralldom of its conscience, Wicliffe, in setting free its soul, would virtually, by a single stroke, have achieved the emancipation of England.

² “His [Wicliffe’s] exertions,” says Mr. Sharon Turner, “were of a value that has been always highly rated, but which the late events of European history considerably enhance, by showing how much the chances are against such a character arising. Many can demolish the superstructure, but where is the skill and the desire to rebuild a nobler fabric? When such men as Wicliffe, Huss, or Luther appear, they preserve society from darkness and depravity; and happy would it be for the peace of European society, if either France, Spain, or Italy could produce them now.” (Turner, *Hist. Eng.*, vol. v., pp. 176, 177.)

³ Walsingham, *Hist. Angliae*, pp. 206-208. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 4.

⁴ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 4, pp. 70-75.

Chapter IX.

Wicliffe's Views on Church Property and Church Reform.

An Eternal Inheritance—Overgrown Riches – Mortmain—Its Ruinous Effects—These Pictured and Denounced by Wicliffe—His Doctrine touching Ecclesiastical Property—Tithes—Novelty of his Views—His Plan of Reform—How he Proposed to Carry it out—Rome a Market—Wicliffe's Independence and Courage—His Plan substantially Proposed in Parliament after his Death—Advance of England—Her Exodus from the Prison-house—Sublimity of the Spectacle—Ode of Celebration.

There was another matter to which Wicliffe often returned, because he held it as second only in importance to “the power of the keys.” This was the property of the Church. The Church was already not only enormously rich, but she had even proclaimed a dogma which was an effectual preventive against that wealth ever being less by so much as a single penny; nay, which secured that her accumulations should go on while the world stood. What is given to the Church, said the canon law, is given to God; it is a devoted thing, consecrated and set for ever to a holy use, and never can it be employed for any secular or worldly end whatever; and he who shall withdraw any part thereof from the Church robs God, and commits the awful sin of sacrilege. Over the man, whoever he might be, whether temporal baron or spiritual dignitary, who should presume to subtract so much as a single acre from her domains or a single penny from her coffers, the canon law suspended a curse. This wealth could not even be recovered: it was the Church's sole, absolute, and eternal inheritance.

This grievance was aggravated by the circumstance that these large possessions were exempt from taxes and public burdens. The clergy kept no connection with the country farther than to prey on it. The third Council of the Lateran forbade all laics, under the usual penalties, to exact any taxes from the clergy, or lay any contributions upon them or upon their Churches.¹ If, however, the necessities of the State were great, and the lands of the laity insufficient, the priests might, of their own good pleasure, grant a voluntary subsidy. The fourth General Council of Lateran renewed this canon, hurling excommunication against all who should disregard it, but graciously permitting the clergy to aid in the exigencies of the State if they saw fit and the Pope were willing.² Here was “a kingdom of priests,” the owners of half the soil, every inch of which was enclosed within a sacred rail, that no one durst lay a finger upon it, unless indeed their foreign head, the Pontiff, should first give his consent.

In these overgrown riches Wicliffe discerned the source of innumerable evils. The nation was being beggared and the Government was being weakened. The lands of the Church were continually growing wider, and the area which supported the burdens of the State and furnished the revenues of the Crown was constantly growing narrower. Nor was the possession of this wealth less hurtful to the corporation that owned it, than its abstraction was to that from whom it had been torn. Whence flowed the many corruptions of the Church, the pride, the luxury, the indolence of Churchmen? Manifestly, from these

¹ Concil. Lateran. iii., cap. 19—Hard., tom. vi., part 2, col. 1681.

² Hard., tom. vii., col. 51. *Vide Decret. Gregory. IX.*, lib. iii.

enormous riches. Sacred uses! So was it pleaded. The more that wealth increased, the less sacred the uses to which it was devoted, and the more flagrant the neglect of the duties which those who possessed it were appointed to discharge.

But Wicliffe's own words will best convey to us an idea of his feelings on this point, and the height to which the evil had grown.

"Prelates and priests," says he, "cry aloud and write that the king hath no jurisdiction or power over the persons and goods of Holy Church. And when the king and the secular Lords, perceiving that their ancestors' alms are wasted in pomp and pride, gluttony and other vanities, wish to take again the superfluity of temporal goods, and to help the land and themselves and their tenants, these worldly clerks bawl loudly that they ought to be cursed for intromitting with the goods of Holy Church, as if secular Lords and Commons were no part of Holy Church."

And again he complains that property which was not too holy to be spent in "gluttony and other vanities," was yet accounted too holy to bear the burdens of the State, and contribute to the defence of the realm.

"By their new law of decretals," says he, "they have ordained that our clergy shall pay no subsidy nor tax for keeping of our king and realm, without leave and assent of the worldly priest of Rome. And yet many times this proud worldly priest is an enemy of our land, and secretly maintains our enemies in war against us with our own gold. And thus they make an alien priest, and he the proudest of all priests, to be the chief lord of the whole of the goods which clerks possess in the realm, and that is the greatest part thereof."³

Wicliffe was not a mere corrector of abuses; he was a reformer of institutions, and accordingly he laid down a principle which menaced the very foundations of this great evil.

Those acres, now covering half the face of England, those cathedral and conventual buildings, those tithes and revenues which constitute the "goods" of the Church are not, Wicliffe affirmed, in any legal or strict sense the Church's property. She neither bought it, nor did she win it by service in the field, nor did she receive it as a feudal, unconditional gift. It is the alms of the English nation. The Church is but the administrator of this property; the nation is the real proprietor, and the nation is bound through the king and Parliament, its representatives, to see that the Church devotes this wealth to the objects for which it was given to her; and if it shall find that it is abused or diverted to other objects, it may recall it. The ecclesiastic who becomes immoral and fails to fulfil the duties of his office, forfeits that office with all its temporalities, and the same law which applies to the individual applies to the whole corporation or Church. Such, in brief, was the doctrine of Wicliffe.⁴

³ See "Opinions of Wicliffe" in Vaughan, *Life of Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 267.

⁴ See 6th, 16th, and 17th articles of defence as given in Lewis, *Life of Wicliffe*, chap. 4, compared with the articles of impeachment in the Pope's bull. Sir James MacIntosh, in his eloquent work *Vindiciae Gallicae*, claims credit for the philosophic statesman Turgot as the first to deliver this theory of Church-lands in the article "Fondation" in the *Encyclopédie*. it was propounded by Wicliffe four centuries before Turgot flourished. (*See Vind. Gall.*, p. 85; Lond., 1791.)

But further, the Reformer distinguished between the lands of the abbacy or the monastery, and the acres of the neighbouring baron. The first were national property, the second were private; the first were held for spiritual uses, the second for secular; and by how much the issues depending on the right use of the first, as regarded both the temporal and eternal interests of mankind, exceeded those depending upon the right use of the second, by so much was the nation bound closely to oversee, and jealously to guard against all perversion and abuse in the case of the former. The baron might feast, hunt, and ride out attended by ever so many men-at-arms; he might pass his days in labour or in idleness, just as suited him. But the bishop must eschew these delights and worldly vanities. He must give himself to reading, to prayer, to the ministry of the Word; he must instruct the ignorant, and visit the sick, and approve himself in all things as a faithful minister of Jesus Christ.⁵

But while Wicliffe made this most important distinction between ecclesiastical and lay property, he held that as regarded the imposts of the king, the estates of the bishop and the estates of the baron were on a level. The sovereign had as good a right to tax the one as the other, and both were equally bound to bear their fair share of the expense of defending the country. Further, Wicliffe held the decision of the king, in all questions touching ecclesiastical property, to be final. And let no one, said the Reformer in effect, be afraid to embrace these opinions, or be deterred from acting on them, by terror of the Papal censures. The spiritual thunder hurts no one whose cause is good.

Even tithes could not now be claimed, Wicliffe held, on a Divine authority. The tenth of all that the soil yielded was, by God's command, set apart for the support of the Church under the economy of Moses. But that enactment, the Reformer taught, was no longer binding. The "ritual" and the "polity" of that dispensation had passed away, and only the "moral" remained. And that "moral" Wicliffe summed up in the words of the apostle, "Let him that is taught in the word minister to him that teacheth in all good things." And while strenuously insisting on the duty of the instructed to provide for their spiritual teachers, he did not hesitate to avow that where the priest notoriously failed in his office the people were under no obligation to support him; and if he should seek by the promise of Paradise, or the threat of anathema, to extort a livelihood, for work which he did not do and from men whom he never taught, they were to hold the promise and the threat as alike empty and futile. "True men say," wrote Wicliffe, "that prelates are more bound to preach truly the Gospel than their subjects are to pay them dymes [tithes]; for God chargeth that more, and it is more profitable to both parties. Prelates, therefore, are more accursed who cease from the preaching than are their subjects who cease to pay tithes, even while their prelates do their office well."⁶

These were novel and startling opinions in the age of Wicliffe. It required no ordinary independence of mind to embrace such views. They were at war with the maxims of the age; they were opposed to the opinions on which Churches and States had acted for a thousand years; and they went to the razing of the whole ecclesiastical settlement of Christendom. If they were to be applied, all existing religious institutions must be

⁵ Treatise on *Clerks and Possessioners*.

⁶ MS. of *Prelates*; *apud* Vaughan, vol. ii., p. 286.

remodelled. But if true, why should they not be carried out? Wicliffe did not shrink from even this responsibility.

He proposed, and not only did he propose, he earnestly pleaded with the king and Parliament, that the whole ecclesiastical estate should be reformed in accordance with the principles he had enunciated. Let the Church surrender all her possessions—her broad acres, her palatial buildings, her tithes, her multiform dues—and return to the simplicity of her early days, and depend only on the free-will offerings of the people, as did the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel. Such was the plan Wicliffe laid before the men of the fourteenth century.⁷ We may well imagine the amazement with which he was listened to.

Did Wicliffe really indulge the hope that his scheme would be carried into effect? Did he really think that powerful abbots and wealthy prelates would sacrifice their principalities, their estates and honours, at the call of duty, and exchanging riches for dependence, and luxurious ease for labour, go forth to instruct the poor and ignorant as humble ministers of the Gospel? There was not faith in the world for such an act of self-denial. Had it been realised, it would have been one of the most marvellous things in all history. Nor did Wicliffe himself expect it to happen. He knew too well the ecclesiastics of his time, and the avarice and pride that animated them, from their head at Avignon down to the bare-footed mendicant of England, to look for such a miracle. But his duty was not to be measured by his chance of success. Reform was needed; it must be attempted if Church and State were to be saved, and here was the reform which stood enjoined, as he believed, in the Scriptures, and which the example of Christ and his apostles confirmed and sanctioned; and though it was a sweeping and comprehensive one, reversing practice of a thousand years, condemning the maxims of past ages, and necessarily provoking the hostility of the wealthiest and most powerful body in Christendom, yet he believed it to be practicable, if men had only virtue and courage enough. Above all, he believed it to be sound, and the only reform that would meet the evil; and therefore, though princes were forsaking him, and Popes were fulminating against him, and bishops were summoning him to their bar, he fearlessly did his duty by displaying his plan in all its breadth before the eyes of the nation, and laying it at the foot of the throne.

But Wicliffe, a man of action as well as of thought, did not aim at carrying this revolution by a stroke. All great changes, he knew, must proceed gradually. What he proposed was that as benefices fell vacant, the new appointments should convey no right to the temporalities, and thus in a short time, without injury or hardship to any one, the whole face of England would be changed. "It is well known," says he, "that the King of England, in virtue of his regalia, on the death of a bishop or abbot, or any one possessing large endowments, takes possession of these endowments as the sovereign, and that a new election is not entered upon without a new assent; nor will the temporalities in such a case pass from their last occupant to his successor without that assent. Let the king, therefore, refuse to continue what has been the great delinquency of his predecessors, and in a short time the whole kingdom will be freed from the mischiefs which have flowed from this source."

⁷ MS. *Sentence of the Curse Expounded*; apud Vaughan, vol. ii., p 289.

It may perhaps be objected that thus to deprive the Church of her property was to injure vitally the interests of religion and civilisation. With the abstract question we have here nothing to do; let us look at the matter practically, and as it must have presented itself to Wicliffe. The withdrawal of the Church's property from the service of religion was already all but complete. So far as concerned the religious instruction and the spiritual interests of the nation, this wealth profited about as little as if it did not exist at all. It served but to maintain the pomps of the higher clergy, and the excesses which reigned in the religious houses. The question then, practically, was not, Shall this property be withdrawn from religious uses? but, Shall it be withdrawn from its actual uses, which certainly are not religious, and be devoted to other objects more profitable to the commonwealth? On that point Wicliffe had a clear opinion; he saw a better way of supporting the clergy, and he could not, he thought, devise a worse than the existing one. "It is thus," he says, "that the wretched beings of this world are estranged from faith, and hope, and charity, and become corrupt in heresy and blasphemy, even worse than heathens. Thus it is that a clerk, a mere collector of pence, who can neither read nor understand a verse in his psalter, nor repeat the commandments of God, bringeth forth a bull of lead, testifying in opposition to the doom of God, and of manifest experience, that he is able to govern many souls. And to act upon this false bull he will incur costs and labour, and often fight, and get fees, and give much gold out of our land to aliens and enemies; and many are thereby slaughtered by the hand of our enemies, to their comfort and our confusion."⁸

Elsewhere he describes Rome as a market, where the cure of souls was openly sold, and where the man who offered the highest price got the fattest benefice. In that market, virtue, piety, learning, were nought. The only coin current was gold. But the men who trafficked there, and came back invested with a spiritual office, he thus describes: "As much, therefore, as God's Word, and the bliss of heaven in the souls of men, are better than earthly goods, so much are these worldly prelates, who withdraw the great debt of holy teaching, worse than thieves; more accursedly sacrilegious than ordinary plunderers, who break into churches, and steal thence chalices, and vestments, and never so much gold."⁹

Whatever may be the reader's judgment of the sentiments of Wicliffe on this point, there can be but one opinion touching his independence of mind, and his fidelity to what he believed to be the truth. Looking back on history, and looking around in the world, he could see only a unanimous dissent from his doctrine. All the ages were against him; all the institutions of Christendom were against him. The Bible only, he believed, was with him. Supported by it, he bravely held and avowed his opinion. His peril was great, for he had made the whole hierarchy of Christendom his enemy. He had specially provoked the wrath of that spiritual potentate whom few kings in that age could brave with impunity. But he saw by faith Him who is invisible, and therefore he feared not Gregory. The evil this wealth was doing, the disorders and weakness with which it was afflicting the State, the immorality and ignorance with which it was corrupting society, and the eternal ruin in which it was plunging the souls of men, deeply affected him; and though the riches which

⁸ MS. *Sentence of the Curse Expounded*; apud Vaughan, *Life of Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 306.

⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 14.

he so earnestly entreated men to surrender had been a million of times more than they were, they would have been in his account but as dust in the balance compared with the infinite damage which it cost to keep them, and the infinite good which would be reaped by parting with them.

Nor even to the men of his own time did the measure of the Reformer seem so very extravagant. Doubtless the mere mention of it took away the breath from those who had touched this gold; but the more sober and thoughtful in the nation began to see that it was not so impracticable as it looked, and that instead of involving the destruction it was more likely to be the saving of the institutions of learning and religion. About twenty-four years after the Reformer's death, a great measure of Church reform, based on the views of Wicliffe, was proposed by the Commons. The plan took shape in a petition which Parliament presented to the king, and which was to the following effect:—That the crown should take possession of all the property of the Church; that it should appoint a body of clergy, fifteen thousand in number, for the religious service of the kingdom; that it should assign an annual stipend to each; and that the surplus of the ecclesiastical property should be devoted to a variety of State purposes, of which the building and support of almshouses was one.¹⁰

Those who had the power could not or would not see the wisdom of the Reformer. Those who did see it had not the power to act upon it, and so the wealth of the Church remained untouched; and, remaining untouched, it continued to grow, and along with it all the evils it engendered, till at last these were no longer bearable. Then even Popish governments recognised the wisdom of Wicliffe's words, and began to act upon his plan. In Germany, under the treaty of Westphalia, in Holland, in our own country, many of the richest benefices were secularised. When, at a later period, most of the Catholic monarchies suppressed the Jesuits, the wealth of that opulent body was seized by the sovereign. In these memorable examples we discover no trace of *property*, but simply the resumption by the State of the *salaries* of its public servants, when it deemed their services or the mode of them no longer useful.

These examples are the best testimony to the substantial soundness of Wicliffe's views; and the more we contemplate the times in which he formed them, the more are we amazed at the sagacity, the comprehensiveness, the courage, and the faith of the Reformer.

In these events we contemplate the march of England out of the house of her bondage. Wicliffe is the one and only leader in this glorious exodus. No Aaron marches by the side of this Moses. But the nation follows its heroic guide, and steadfastly pursues the sublime path of its emancipation. Every year places a greater distance between it and the slavery it is leaving, and brings it nearer the liberty that lies before it. What a change since the days of King John! Then Innocent III. stood with his heel on the country. England was his humble vassal, fain to buy off his interdicts and curses with its gold, and to bow down even to the dust before his legates; but now, thanks to John Wicliffe, England stands erect, and meets the haughty Pontiff on at least equal terms.

¹⁰ Walsingham. Hume, *Hist. of England*, chap 18, pp. 366, 367. Cobbett, *Parliament. Hist. of England*, vol. i., pp. 295, 296.

And what a fine logical sequence is seen running through the process of the emancipation of the country! The first step was to cast off its political vassalage to the Papal chair; the second was to vindicate the independence of its Church against her who haughtily styles herself the “Mother and Mistress of all Churches;” the third was to make good the sole and unchallenged use of its own property, by forbidding the gold of the nation to be carried across the sea for the use of the country’s foes. And now another step forward is taken. A proposal is heard to abate the power of superstition within the realm, by curtailing its overgrown resources, heedless of the cry of sacrilege, the only weapon by which the Church attempted to protect the wealth that had been acquired by means not the most honourable, and which was now devoted to ends not the most useful.

England is the first of the European communities to flee from that prison-house in which the Crowned Priest of the Seven Hills had shut up the nations. That cruel taskmaster had decreed an utter and eternal extinction of all national independence and of all human rights. But He who “openeth the eyes of the blind,” and “raiseth them that are bowed down,” had pity on those whom their oppressor had destined to endless captivity, and opened their prison-doors. We celebrate in songs the Exodus of early times. We magnify the might of that Hand and the strength of that Arm which broke the power of Pharaoh; which “opened the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder;” which divided the sea, and led the marshalled hosts of the Hebrews out of bondage. Here is the reality of which the other was but the figure. England comes forth, the first of the nations, led on by Wicliffe, and giving assurance to the world by her reappearance that all the captive nationalities which have shared her bondage shall, each in its appointed season, share her deliverance.

Rightly understood, is there in all history a grander spectacle, or a drama more sublime? We forget the wonders of the first Exodus when we contemplate the mightier scale and the more enduring glories of the second. When we think of the bitterness and baseness of the slavery which England left behind her, and the glorious heritage of freedom and God-given religion to which she now began to point her steps, we can find no words in which to vent our gratitude and praise but those of the Divine Ode written long before, and meant at once to predict and to commemorate this glorious emancipation: “He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the sons of men.”¹¹

¹¹ Psalm cvii. 14, 15.

Chapter X.

The Translation of the Scriptures, or the English Bible.

Peril of Wicliffe—Death of Gregory XI.—Death of Edward III.—Consequent Safety of Wicliffe—Schism in the Papal Church—Division in Christendom—Which is the True Pope?—A Papal Thunderstorm—Wicliffe Retires to Lutterworth—His Views still Enlarging—Supreme Authority of Scripture—Sickness, and Interview with the Friars—Resolves to Translate the Bible—Early Translations—Bede, &c.—Wicliffe's Translation—Its Beauty—The Day of the Reformation has fairly Broken—Transcription and Publication—Impression produced—Right to Read the Bible—Denounced by the Priests—Defended by Wicliffe—Transformation accomplished on England.

While Wicliffe was struggling to break first of all his own fetters, and next the fetters of an enslaved nation, God was working in the high places of the earth for his preservation. Every day the number of his enemies increased. The shield of John of Gaunt no longer covered his head. Soon not a friend would there be by his side, and he would be left naked and defenseless to the rage of his foes. But He who said to the patriarch of old, "Fear not, I am thy shield," protected his own chosen champion. Wicliffe had offered inexpiable affront to Gregory; he had plucked England as a prey out of his very teeth; he had driven away his tax-gatherers, who continually hovered like a flock of cormorants round the land. But not content with clipping the talons of the Papacy and checking her rapacity in time to come, he was even now meditating how he might make her reckon for the past, and disgorge the wealth which by so many and so questionable means she had already devoured, and send forth abbot and monk as poor as were the apostles and first preachers. This was not to be borne. For a hundredth part of this, how many men had ere this done expiation in the fire! No wonder that Wicliffe was marked out as the man to be struck down. Three bulls did Gregory dispatch with this object. The university, the hierarchy, the king: on all were the Pontifical commands laid to arrest and imprison the heretic—the short road to the stake. Wicliffe was as good as dead; so doubtless was it thought at Avignon.

Death was about to strike; but it was on Gregory XI. that the blow was destined to fall. Instead of a stake at Oxford, there was a bier at the Vatican. The Pope a little while before had returned to Rome, so terminating the "Babylonish captivity;" but he had returned only to die (1378). But death struck a second time: there was a bier at Westminster as well as at the Vatican. When Courtenay, Bishop of London, was about to summon Wicliffe to his bar, Edward III., whose senility the bishop was likely to take advantage of against the Reformer, died also, and John of Gaunt became regent of the kingdom. So now, when the Papal toils were closing around Wicliffe, death suddenly stiffened the hand that had woven them, and the commission of delegates which the now defunct Gregory had appointed to try, and which he had commanded to condemn the Reformer, was dissolved.¹

In another way did the death of the Pope give a breathing-time to the Reformer and the young Reformation of England. On the 7th of April, 1378, the cardinals assembled in the Quirinal to elect a successor to Gregory. The majority of the sacred college being

¹ Walsingham, *Hist. of Eng.*, p. 205.

Frenchmen, the Roman populace, fearing that they would place one of their own nation in the vacant chair, and that the Pontifical court would again retire to Avignon, gathered round the palace where the cardinals were met, and with loud tumult and terrible threats demanded a Roman for their Pope. Not a cardinal should leave the hall alive, so did the rioters threaten, unless their request was complied with. An Italian, the Archbishop of Bari, was chosen; the mob was soothed, and instead of stoning the cardinals it saluted them with “Vivas.” But the new Pope was austere, penurious, tyrannical, and selfish; the cardinals soon became disgusted, and escaping from Rome they met and chose a Frenchman—Robert, Bishop of Geneva—for the tiara, declaring the former election null on the plea that the choice had been made under compulsion. Thus was created the famous schism in the Papal chair which for a full half-century divided and scandalised the Papal world.

Christendom now saw, with feelings bordering on affright, two Popes in the chair of Peter. Which was the true vicar, and which carried the key that alone could open and shut the gates of Paradise? This became the question of the age, and a most momentous question it was to men who believed that their eternal salvation hung upon its solution. Consciences were troubled; council was divided against council; bishop battled with bishop; and kings and governments were compelled to take part in the quarrel. Germany and England, and some of the smaller States in the centre of Europe, sided with the first-elected Pope, who took possession of the Vatican under the title of Urban VI. Spain, France, and Scotland espoused the cause of the second, who installed himself at Avignon under the name of Clement VII. Thus, as the first dawn of the Gospel day was breaking on Christendom, God clave the Papal head in twain, and divided the Papal world.²

But for this schism Wicliffe, to all human appearance, would have been struck down, and his work in England stamped out. But now the Popes found other work than to pursue heresy. Fast and furious from Rome to Avignon, and from Avignon back again to Rome, flew the Papal bolts. Far above the humble head of the Lutterworth rector flashed these lightnings and rolled these thunders. While this storm was raging, Wicliffe retired to his country charge, glad doubtless to escape for a little while from the attacks of his enemies, and to solace himself in the bosom of his loving flock. He was not idle however. While the Popes were hurling curses at each other, and shedding torrents of blood—for by this time they had drawn the sword in support of their rival claims to be Christ’s vicar—while flagrant scandals and hideous corruptions were ravaging the Church, and frightful crimes and disorders were distracting the State (for it would take “another Iliad,”³ as Fox says, to narrate all the miseries and woes that afflicted the world during this schism), Wicliffe was sowing by the peaceful waters of the Avon, and in the rural homesteads of Lutterworth, that Divine seed which yields righteousness and peace in this world, and eternal life in that which is to come.

It was now that the Reformer opened the second part of his great career. Hitherto his efforts had been mainly directed to breaking the political fetters in which the Papacy had bound his countrymen. But stronger fetters held fast their souls. These his countrymen

² Mosheim, cent. 14, part ii., chap. 2, sec. 14. Hume, Rich. II., Miscell. Trans.

³ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. ii., p. 567.

needed more to have rent, though perhaps they galled them less, and to this higher object the Reformer now exclusively devoted what of life and strength remained to him. In this instance, too, his own fuller emancipation preceded that of his countrymen. The “schism,” with the scandals and crimes that flowed from it, helped to reveal to him yet more clearly the true character of the Papacy. He published a tract *On the Schism of the Popes*, in which he appealed to the nation whether those men who were denouncing each other as the Antichrist were not, in this case, speaking the truth, and whether the present was not an opportunity given them by Providence for grasping those political weapons which he had wrested from the hands of the hierarchy, and using them in the destruction of those oppressive and iniquitous laws and customs under which England had so long groaned. “The fiend,” he said, “no longer reigns in one but in two priests, that men may the more easily, in Christ’s name, overcome them both.”⁴

We trace from this time a rapid advance in the views of the Reformer. It was now that he published his work *On the Truth and Meaning of Scripture*. In this work he maintains “the supreme authority of Scripture,” “the right of private judgment,” and that “Christ’s law sufficeth by itself to rule Christ’s Church.” This was to discrown the Pope, and to raze the foundations of his kingdom. Here he drops the first hint of his purpose to translate the Bible into the English vernacular—a work which was to be the crown of his labours.⁵

Wicliffe was now getting old, but the Reformer was worn out rather by the harassing attacks of his foes, and his incessant and ever-growing labours, than with the weight of years, for he was not yet sixty. He fell sick. With unbounded joy the friars heard that their great enemy was dying. Of course he was overwhelmed with horror and remorse for the evil he had done them, and they would hasten to his bedside and receive the expression of his penitence and sorrow. In a trice a little crowd of shaven crowns assembled round the couch of the sick man—delegates from the four orders of friars. “They began fair,” wishing him “health and restoration from his distemper;” but speedily changing their tone, they exhorted him, as one on the brink of the grave, to make full confession, and express his unfeigned grief for the injuries he had inflicted on their order. Wicliffe lay silent till they should have made an end, then, making his servant raise him a little on his pillow, and fixing his keen eyes upon them, he said with a loud voice, “I shall not die, but live and declare the evil deeds of the friars.” The monks rushed in astonishment and confusion from the chamber.⁶

As Wicliffe had foretold so it came to pass. His sickness left him, and he rose from his bed to do the most daring of his impieties as his enemies accounted it, the most glorious of his services as the friends of humanity will ever esteem it. The work of which so very different estimates have been formed, was that of giving the Bible to the people of England in their own tongue. True, there were already copies of the Word of God in England, but they were in a language the commonalty did not understand, and so the

⁴ MS. of *The Church and her Governance*, Bib. Reg 18, B. ix.; *apud* Vaughan, *Life of Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 6.

⁵ *De Sensu et Veritate Scripturae*. A copy of this work was in the possession of Fox the martyrologist. (Fox, vol. i.) Two copies of it are known to be still extant, one in the Bodleian Library and the other in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. (Vaughan, *Life*, vol ii., p. 7.)

⁶ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 82. Lewis places this occurrence in the beginning of the year 1379.

revelation of God to man was as completely hidden from the people as if God had never spoken.

To this ignorance of the will of God, Wicliffe traced the manifold evils that afflicted the kingdom. "I will fill England with light," he might have said, "and the ghostly terrors inspired by the priests, and the bondage in which they keep the people through their superstitious fears, will flee away as do the phantoms of the night when the sun rises. I will re-open the appointed channel of holy influence between earth and the skies, and the face of the world will be renewed." It was a sublime thought.

Till the seventh century we meet with no attempt to give the Bible to the people of England in their mother-tongue. Caedmon, an Anglo-Saxon monk, was the first to give the English people a taste of what the Bible contained. We cannot call his performance a translation. Caedmon appears to have possessed a poetic genius, and deeming the opening incidents of inspired history well fitted for the drama, he wove them into a poem, which, beginning with the Creation, ran on through the scenes of patriarchal times, the miracles of the Exodus, the journey through the desert, till it terminated at the gates of Palestine and the entrance of the tribes into the Promised Land. Such a book was not of much account as an instruction in the will of God and the way of Life. Others followed with attempts at paraphrasing rather than translating portions of the Word of God, among whom were Alfric and Alfred the Great. The former epitomised several of the books of the Old Testament; the latter in the ninth century summoned a body of learned men to translate the Scriptures, but scarcely was the task begun when the great prince died, and the work was stopped.

The attempt of Bede in the eighth century deserves our notice. He is said to have translated into the Anglo-Saxon tongue the Gospel of John. He was seized with a fatal illness after beginning, but he vehemently longed to finish before breathing forth his spirit. He toiled at his task day by day, although the malady continued, and his strength sank lower and lower. His life and his work were destined to end together. At length the morning of that day dawned which the venerable man felt would be his last on earth. There remained yet one chapter to be translated. He summoned the amanuensis to his bedside. "Take your pen," said Bede, who felt that every minute was precious—"quick, take your pen and write." The amanuensis read verse by verse from the Vulgate, which, rendered into Anglo-Saxon by Bede, was taken down by the swift pen of the writer. As they pursued their joint labour, they were interrupted by the entrance of some officials, who came to make arrangements to which the assent of the dying man was required. This over, the loving scribe was again at his task. "Dear master," said he, "there is yet one verse." "Be quick," said Bede. It was read in Latin, repeated in Anglo-Saxon, and put down in writing. "It is finished," said the amanuensis in a tone of exultation. "Thou hast truly said it is finished," responded in soft and grateful accents the dying man. Then gently raising his hands he said, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," and expired.⁷

From the reign of Alfred in the ninth century till the age of Wicliffe there was no attempt—if we except that of Richard Roll, Hermit of Hampole, in the same century with

⁷ Cuthbert, *Vita Ven. Bedae*.

Wicliffe—to give a literal translation of any portion of the Bible.⁸ And even if the versions of which we have spoken had been worthier and more complete, they did not serve the end their authors sought. They were rarely brought beyond the precincts of the cell, or they were locked up as curiosities in the library of some nobleman at whose expense copies had been made. They did not come into the hands of the people.

Wicliffe's idea was to give the whole Bible in the vernacular to the people of England, so that every man in the realm might read in the tongue wherein he was born the wonderful works of God. No one in England laid thought of such a thing before. As one who turns away from the sun to guide his steps by the light of a taper, so did the men of those days turn to tradition, to the scholastic philosophy, to Papal infallibility; but the more they followed these guides, the farther they strayed from the true path. God was in the world; the Divine Light was in the pavilion of the Word, but no one thought of drawing aside the curtain and letting that light shine upon the path of men. This was the achievement Wicliffe now set himself to do. If he could accomplish this he would do more to place the liberties of England on an immutable foundation, and to raise his country to greatness, than would a hundred brilliant victories.

He had not, however, many years in which to do his great work. There remained only the portion of a decade of broken health. But his intellectual vigour was unimpaired, his experience and graces were at their ripest. What had the whole of his past life been but a preparation for what was to be the glorious task of his evening? He was a good Latin scholar. He set himself down in his quiet Rectory of Lutterworth. He opened the Vulgate Scriptures, that book which all his life he had studied, and portions of which he had already translated. The world around him was shaken with convulsions; two Popes were hurling their anathemas at one another. Wicliffe pursued his sublime work undisturbed by the roar of the tempest. Day by day he did his self-appointed task. As verse after verse was rendered into the English tongue, the Reformer had the consolation of thinking that another ray had been shot into the darkness which brooded over his native land, that another bolt had been forged to rend the shackles which bound the souls of his countrymen. In four years from beginning his task, the Reformer had completed it. The message of Heaven was now in the speech of England. The dawn of the Reformation had fairly broken.

Wicliffe had assistance in his great work. The whole of the New Testament was translated by himself; but Dr. Nicholas de Hereford, of Oxford, supposed to have been the translator of the Old Testament, which, however, was partly revised by Wicliffe. This version is remarkably truthful and spirited. The antique Saxon gives a dramatic air to some

⁸ Sir Thomas More believed that there existed in MS. an earlier translation of the Scriptures into English than Wicliffe's. Thomas James, first librarian of the Bodleian Library, thought that he had seen an older MS. Bible in English than the time of Wicliffe. Thomas Wharton, editor of the works of Archbishop Ussher, thought he was able to show who the writer of these supposed pre-Wicliffite translations was—viz., John von Trevisa, priest in Cornwall. Wharton afterwards saw cause to change his opinion, and was convinced that the MS. which Sir Thomas More and Thomas James had seen was nothing else than copies of the translation of Wicliffe made by his disciples. If an older translation of the Bible had existed there must have been some certain traces of it, and the Wicliffites would not have failed to bring it up in their own justification. They knew nothing of an older translation. (See Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 431.)

passages.⁹ Wicliffe's version of the Bible rendered other services than the religious one, though that was pre-eminent and paramount. It powerfully contributed to form the English tongue, in the way of perfecting its structure and enlarging its vocabulary. The sublimity and purity of the doctrines reacted on the language into which they were rendered, communicating to it a simplicity, a beauty, a pathos, a precision, and a force unknown to it till then. Wicliffe has been called the Father of English Prose, as Chaucer is styled the Father of English Poetry. No man in his day wrote so much as Wicliffe. Writing for the common people, he studied to be simple and clear. He was in earnest, and the enthusiasm of his soul supplied him with direct and forcible terms. He wrote on the highest themes, and his style partook of the elevation of his subject; it is graphic and trenchant, and entirely free from those conceits and puerilities which disfigure the productions of all the other writers of his day. But his version of the Bible surpasses all his other compositions in tenderness, and grace, and dignity.¹⁰ Lechler has well said on this point: "If we compare, however, Wicliffe's Bible, not with his own English writings, but with the other English literature before and after him, a still more important consideration suggests itself. Wicliffe's translation marks in its own way quite as great an epoch in the development of the English language, as Luther's translation does in the history of the German language. Luther's Bible opened the period of the new high German, Wicliffe's Bible stands at the top of the mediaeval English. It is true, Geoffrey Chaucer, the Father of English Poetry, and not Wicliffe, is generally considered as the pioneer of mediaeval English literature. But with much more reason have later philologists assigned that rank to the prose of Wicliffe's Bible. Chaucer has certainly some rare traits—liveliness of description, charming grace of expression, genuine English humour, and masterly power of language—but such qualities address themselves more to men of culture. They are not adapted to be a form of speech for the mass of the people. That which is to propagate a new language must be something on which the weal and woe of mankind depend, which therefore irresistibly seizes upon all, the highest as well as the lowest, and, as Luther says, 'fills the heart.' It must be a moral, religious truth, which, grasped with a new inspiration, finds acceptance and diffusion in a new form of speech. As Luther opened up in Germany a higher development of the Teutonic language, so Wicliffe and his school have become through his Bible the

⁹ "Thus, instead of 'Paul the servant of Jesus Christ,' Wicliffe's version gives, 'Paul the knave of Jesus Christ.' 'For a mightier than I cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose,' his version reads, 'For a stalworthier than I cometh after me, the strings of whose chaucers I am not worthy to unlouse.'" (M'Crie, *Annals of English Presbytery*, p. 41.)

¹⁰ Luther translated the Bible out of the original Greek. Wicliffe, who did not know Greek, translated out of the Latin Vulgate. That the New Testament was translated by himself is tolerably certain. Lechler says that the translation of the Old Testament, in the original handwriting, with erasures and alterations, is in the Bodleian Library; and that there is also there a MS. copy of this translation, with a note saying that it was the work of Dr. Nicholas de Hereford. Both manuscripts break off in the middle of a verse of the Book Baruch, which strengthens the probability that the translation was by Dr. Nicholas, who was suddenly summoned before the Provincial Synod at London, and did not resume his work. The translation itself proves that the work from Baruch onward to the end was by some one else—not improbably Wicliffe himself. (See Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., p. 448.)

founders of the mediaeval English, in which last lie the fundamental features of the new English since the sixteenth century.”¹¹

The Reformer had done his great work (1382). What an epoch in the history of England! What mattered it when a dungeon or a grave might close over him? He had kindled a light which could never be put out. He had placed in the hands of his countrymen their true Magna Charta. That which the barons at Runnymede had wrested from King John would have been turned to but little account had not this mightier charter come after. Wicliffe could now see the Saxon people, guided by this pillar of fire, marching steadily onward to liberty. It might take one or it might take five centuries to consummate their emancipation; but, with the Bible in their mother-tongue, no power on earth could retain them in thralldom. The doors of the house of their bondage had been flung open.

When the work of *translating* was ended, the nearly as difficult work of *publishing* began. In those days there was no printing-press to multiply copies by the thousand as in our times, and no publishing firm to circulate these thousands over the kingdom. The author himself had to see to all this. The methods of publishing a book in that age were various. The more common way was to place a copy in the hall of some convent or in the library of some college, where all might come and read, and, if the book pleased, order a copy to be made for their own use; much as, at this day, an artist displays his picture in a hall or gallery, where its merits find admirers and often purchasers. Others set up pulpits at cross-ways, and places of public resort, and read portions of their work in the hearing of the audiences that gathered round them, and those who liked what they heard bought copies for themselves. But Wicliffe did not need to have recourse to any of these expedients. The interest taken in the man and in his work enlisted a hundred expert hands, who, though they toiled to multiply copies, could scarcely supply the many who were eager to buy. Some ordered complete copies to be made for them; others were content with portions; the same copy served several families in many instances, and in a very short time Wicliffe’s English Bible had obtained a wide circulation,¹² and brought a new life into many an English home.

As when the day opens on some weary traveller who, all night long has been groping his way amid thickets and quagmires, so was it with those of the English people who read the Word of Life now presented to them in their mother-tongue. As they were toiling amid the fatal pitfalls of superstition, or were held fast in the thorny thickets of a sceptical scholasticism, suddenly this great light broke upon them. They rejoiced with an exceeding great joy. They now saw the open path to the Divine Mercy-seat; and putting aside the many mediators whom Rome had commissioned to conduct them to it, but who in reality had hidden it from them, they entered boldly by the one Mediator, and stood in the presence of Him who sitteth upon the Throne.

¹¹ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. i., pp. 453, 454. See also Friedrich Koch, *Historische Grammatik der Englischen Sprache*, i., p. 19; 1863.

¹² In 1850 an edition of Wicliffe’s Bible, the first ever printed, issued from the press of Oxford. It is in four octavo volumes, and contains two different texts. The editors, the Rev. Mr. Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden, in preparing it for the press, collated not fewer than 150 manuscript copies, the most of which were transcribed, they had reason to think, within forty years of the first appearance of the translation.

The hierarchy, when they learned what Wicliffe had done, were struck with consternation. They had comforted themselves with the thought that the movement would die with Wicliffe, and that he had but a few years to live. They now saw that another instrumentality, mightier than even Wicliffe, had entered the field; that another preacher was destined to take his place, when the Reformer's voice should be silent. This preacher they could not bind to a stake and burn. With silent foot he was already traversing the length and breadth of England. When head of princely abbot and lordly prelate reposed on pillow, this preacher, who "did not know sleep with his eye day nor night," was executing his mission, entering the homes and winning the hearts of the people. They raised a great cry. Wicliffe had attacked the Church; he wished to destroy religion itself.

This raised the question of the right of the people to read the Bible. The question was new in England, for the plain reason that till now there had been no Bible to read. And for the same reason there was no law prohibiting the use of the Bible by the people, it being deemed both useless and imprudent to enact a law against an offence it was then impossible to commit. The *Romaunt* version, the vernacular of the south of Europe in the Middle Ages, had been in existence for two centuries, and the Church of Rome had forbidden its use. The English was the first of the modern tongues into which the Word of God was translated, and though this version was to fall under the ban of the Church,¹³ as the *Romaunt* had done before it, the hierarchy, taken unawares, were not yet ready with their fulmination, and meanwhile the Word of God spread mightily. The Waters of Life were flowing through the land, and spots of verdure were beginning to beautify the desert of England.

But if not a *legal*, a *moral* interdict was instantly promulgated against the reading of the Bible by the people. Henry de Knighton, Canon of Leicester, uttered a mingled wail of sorrow and denunciation. "Christ," said he, "delivered his Gospel to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might administer to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the state of the times and the wants of men. But this Master John Wicliffe translated it out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine, and that which was before precious to both clergy and laity is rendered, as it were, common jest to both."¹⁴

In short, a great clamour was raised against the Reformer by the priests and their followers, unhappily the bulk of the nation. He was a heretic, a sacrilegious man; he had committed a crime unknown to former ages; he had broken into the temple and stolen the

¹³ In 1408, an English council, with Archbishop Arundel at its head, enacted and ordained "that no one henceforth do, by his own authority, translate any text of Holy Scripture into the English tongue, or any other, by way of book or treatise, nor let any such book or treatise now lately composed in the time of John Wicliffe aforesaid, or since, or hereafter to be composed, be read in whole or in part, in public or in private, under pain of the greater excommunication." So far as this council could secure it, not only was the translation of Wicliffe to be taken from them, but the people of England were never, in any coming age, to have a version of the Word of God in their own tongue, or in any living language. (Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii. 317.)

¹⁴ Knighton, *De Event. Angliae; apud X. Scriptores*, col. 2644. Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 5, p. 83.

sacred vessels; he had fired the House of God. Such were the terms in which the man was spoken of, who had given to his country the greatest boon England ever received.

Wicliffe had to fight the battle alone. No peer or great man stood by his side. It would seem as if there must come, in the career of all great reformers—and Wicliffe stands in the first rank—a moment when, forsaken of all, and painfully sensible of their isolation, they must display the perfection and sublimity of faith by leaning only on One, even God. Such a moment had come to the Reformer of the fourteenth century. Wicliffe stood alone in the storm. But he was tranquil; he looked his raging foes calmly in the face. He retorted on them the charges they had hurled against himself. You say, said he, that “it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English.” You call me a heretic because I have translated the Bible into the common tongue of the people. Do you know whom you blaspheme? Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother-tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed? Why do you speak against the Holy Ghost? You say that the Church of God is in danger from this book. How can that be? Is it not from the Bible only that we learn that God has set up such a society as a Church on the earth? Is it not the Bible that gives all her authority to the Church? Is it not from the Bible that we learn who is the Builder and Sovereign of the Church, what are the laws by which she is to be governed, and the rights and privileges of her members? Without the Bible, what charter has the Church to show for all these? It is you who place the Church in jeopardy by hiding the Divine warrant, the missive royal of her King, for the authority she wields and the faith she enjoins.¹⁵

The circulation of the Scriptures had arrayed the Protestant movement in the panoply of light. Wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, it was marching on, leaving behind it, as the monuments of its prowess, in many an English homestead, eyes once blind now opened; hearts lately depraved now purified. Majestic as the morning when, descending from the skies, she walks in steps of silent glory over the earth, so was the progress of the Book of God. There was a track of light wherever it had passed in the crowded city, in the lofty baronial hall, in the peasant’s humble cot. Though Wicliffe had lived a thousand years, and occupied himself during all of them in preaching, he could not have hoped for the good which he now saw in course of being accomplished by the silent action of the English Bible.

¹⁵ See Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, pp. 86-88.

Chapter XI.

Wicliffe and Transubstantiation.

Wicliffe Old—Continues the War—Attacks Transubstantiation—History of the Dogma—Wicliffe's Doctrine on the Eucharist—Condemned by the University Court—Wicliffe Appeals to the King and Parliament, and Retires to Lutterworth—The Insurrection of Wat Tyler—The Primate Sudbury Beheaded—Courtenay elected Primate—He cites Wicliffe before him—The Synod at Blackfriars—An Earthquake—The Primate reassures the Terrified Bishops—Wicliffe's Doctrine on the Eucharist Condemned—The Primate gains over the King—The First Persecuting Edict—Wicliffe's Friends fall away.

Did the Reformer now rest? He was old and sickly, and needed repose. His day had been a stormy one; sweet it were at its even-tide to taste a little quiet. But no. He panted, if it were possible and if God were willing, to see his country's emancipation completed, and England a reformed land, before closing his eyes and descending into his grave. It was, he felt, a day of visitation. That day had come first of all to England. Oh that she were wise, and that in this her day she knew the things that belonged to her peace! If not, she might have to buy with many tears and much blood, through years, and it might be centuries, of conflict, what seemed now so nearly within her reach. Wicliffe resolved, therefore, that there should be no pause in the war. He had just ended one battle, he now girded himself for another. He turned to attack the doctrinal system of the Church of Rome.

He had come ere this to be of opinion that the system of Rome's doctrines, and the ceremonies of her worship, were anti-Christian—a “new religion, founded of sinful men,” and opposed to “the rule of Jesus Christ given by him to his apostles;” but in beginning this new battle he selected one particular dogma as the object of attack. That dogma was Transubstantiation. It is here that the superstition of Rome culminates: it is in this more than in any other dogma that we find the sources of her prodigious authority, and the springs of her vast influence. In making his blow to fall here, Wicliffe knew that the stroke would have ten-fold more effect than if directed against a less vital part of the system. If he could abolish the sacrifice of the priest, he would bring back the sacrifice of Christ, which alone is the Gospel, because through it is the “remission of sins,” and the “life everlasting.”

Transubstantiation, as we have already shown, was invented by the monk Paschasius Radbertus in the ninth century; it came into England in the train of William the Conqueror and his Anglo-Norman priests; it was zealously preached by Lanfranc, a Benedictine monk and Abbot of St. Stephen of Caen in Normandy,¹ who was raised to the See of Canterbury under William; and from the time of Lanfranc to the days of Wicliffe this tenet was received by the Anglo-Norman clergy of England.² It was hardly to be expected that they

¹ Gabriel d'Emillianne, Preface.

² “It had been for near a thousand years after Christ the Catholic doctrine,” says Lewis, “and particularly of this Church of England, that, as one of our Saxon homilies expresses it, ‘Much is betwixt the body of Christ suffered in, and the body hallowed to housell [the Sacrament] this latter being only his Ghostly body gathered of many cornes, without blood and bone, without limb, without soule, and therefore nothing

would very narrowly or critically examine the foundations of a doctrine which contributed so greatly to their power; and as regards the laity of those days, it was enough for them if they had the word of the Church that this doctrine was true.

In the spring of 1381, Wicliffe posted up at Oxford twelve propositions denying the dogma of transubstantiation, and challenging all of the contrary opinion to debate the matter with him.³ The first of these propositions was as follows:—"The consecrated Host, which we see upon the altar, is neither Christ nor any part of him, but an efficacious sign of him." He admitted that the words of consecration invest the elements with a mysterious and venerable character, but that they do in nowise change their substance. The bread and wine are as really bread and wine after as before their consecration. Christ, he goes on to reason, called the elements "bread" and "my body;" they were "bread" and they were Christ's "body," as he himself is very man and very God, without any commingling of the two natures; so the elements are "bread" and "Christ's body"—"bread" really, and "Christ's body" figuratively and spiritually. Such, in brief, is what Wicliffe avowed as his opinion on the Eucharist at the commencement of the controversy, and on this ground he continued to stand all throughout it.⁴

Great was the commotion at Oxford. There were astonished looks, there was a buzz of talk, heads were laid close together in earnest and subdued conversation but no one accepted the challenge of Wicliffe. All shouted heresy; on that point there was a clear unanimity of opinion, but no one ventured to prove it to the only man in Oxford who needed to have it proved to him. The chancellor of the University, William de Barton, summoned a council of twelve—four secular doctors and eight monks. The council unanimously condemned Wicliffe's opinion as heretical, and threatened divers heavy penalties against any one who should teach it in the university, or listen to the teaching of it.⁵

The council, summoned in haste, met, it would seem, in comparative secrecy, for Wicliffe knew nothing of what was going on. He was in his class-room, expounding to his students the true nature of the Eucharist, when the door opened, and a delegate from the council made his appearance in the hall. He held in his hand the sentence of the doctors, which he proceeded to read. It enjoined silence on Wicliffe as regarded his opinions on

is to be understood therein bodily, but all is to be ghostly understood." (Homily published by Archbishop Parker, with attestation of Archbishop of York and thirteen bishops, and imprinted at London by John Day, Aldersgate beneath St. Martin's. 1567.)

³ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 6.

⁴ *Conclusiones J. Wiclefi de Sacramento Altaris*—MS. Hyp. Bodl. 163. The first proposition is—"Hostia consecrata quam videmus in Altari nec est Christus nec aliqua sui pars, sed efficax ejus signum." See also *Confessio Magistri Johannis Wycliff*—Lewis, Appendix, 323. In this confession he says: "For we believe that there is a three-fold mode of the subsistence of the body of Christ in the consecrated Host, namely, a virtual, a spiritual, and a sacramental one" (*virtualis, spiritualis, et sacramentalis*).

⁵ *Definitio facta per Cancellarium et Doctores Universitatis Oxonii, de Sacramento Altaris contra Opiniones Wiicliffanas*—MS. Hyp. Bodl. 163. Vaughan says: "Sir R. Twisden refers to the above censures in support of this doctrine as 'the first plenary determination of the Church of England' respecting it, and accordingly concludes that 'the opinion of the Church of transubstantiation, that brought so many to the stake, had not more than a hundred and forty years' prescription before Martin Luther.'" (Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 82, foot-note.)

transubstantiation, under pain of imprisonment, suspension from all scholastic functions, and the greater excommunication. This was tantamount to his expulsion from the university. “But,” interposed Wicliffe, “you ought first to have shown me that I am in error.” The only response was to be reminded of the sentence of the court, to which, he was told, he must submit himself, or take the penalty. “Then,” said Wicliffe, “I appeal to the king and the Parliament.”⁶

But some time was to elapse before Parliament should meet; and meanwhile the Reformer, watched and fettered in his chair, thought best to withdraw to Lutterworth. The jurisdiction of the chancellor of the university could not follow him to his parish. He passed a few quiet months ministering the “true bread” to his loving flock; being all the more anxious, since he could no longer make his voice heard at Oxford, to diffuse through his pulpit and by his pen those blessed truths which he had drawn from the fountains of Revelation. He needed, moreover, this heavenly bread for his own support. “Come aside with me and rest awhile,” was the language of this Providence. In communion with his Master he would efface the pain of past conflicts, and arm himself for new ones. His way hitherto had been far from smooth, but what remained of it was likely to be even rougher. This, however, should be as God willed; one thing he knew, and oh, how transporting the thought!—that he should find a quiet home at the end of it.

New and unexpected clouds now gathered in the sky. Before Wicliffe could prosecute his appeal in Parliament, an insurrection broke out in England. The causes and the issues of that insurrection do not here concern us, farther than as they bore on the fate of the Reformer. Wat Tyler, and a profligate priest of the name of Ball, traversed England, rousing the passions of the populace with fiery harangues preached from the text they had written upon their banners:—

“When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?”

These tumults were not confined to England, they extended to France and other Continental countries, and like the sudden yawning of a gulf, they show us the inner condition of society in the fourteenth century. How different from its surface!—the theatre of wars and pageants, which alone the historian thinks it worth his while to paint. There was nothing in the teaching of Wicliffe to minister stimulus to such ebullitions of popular wrath, yet it suited his enemies to lay them at his door, and to say, “See what comes of permitting these strange and demoralising doctrines to be taught.” It were a wholly superfluous task to vindicate Wicliffe or the Gospel on this score.

But in one way these events did connect themselves with the Reformer. The mob apprehended Sudbury the primate, and beheaded him.⁷ Courtenay, the bitter enemy of Wicliffe, was installed in the vacant see. And now we look for more decisive measures against him. Yet God, by what seemed an oversight at Rome, shielded the venerable Reformer. The bull appointing Courtenay to the primacy arrived, but the pall did not come with it. The pall, it is well known, is the most essential of all those badges and insignia by

⁶ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, chap. 6, pp. 95, 96.

⁷ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 568.

which the Pope conveys to bishops the authority to act under him. Courtenay was too obedient a son of the Pope knowingly to transgress one of the least of his father's commandments. He burned with impatience to strike the head of heresy in England, but his scrupulous conscience would not permit him to proceed even against Wicliffe till the pall had given him full investiture with office.⁸ Hence the refreshing quiet and spiritual solace which the Reformer continued to enjoy at his country rectory. It was now that Wicliffe, shot another bolt—the *Wicket*.

At last the pall arrived. The primate, in possession of the mysterious and potent symbol, could now exercise the full powers of his great office. He immediately convoked a synod to try the Rector of Lutterworth. The court met on the 17th of May, 1382, in a place of evil augury—when we take into account with whom Wicliffe's life-battle had been waged—the monastery of Blackfriars, London. The judges were assembled, including eight prelates, fourteen doctors of the canon and of the civil law, six bachelors of divinity, four monks, and fifteen Mendicant friars. They had taken their seats, and were proceeding to business, when an ominous sound filled the air, and the building in which they were assembled began to rock. The monastery and all the city of London were shaken by an earthquake.⁹ Startled and terrified, the members of the court, turning to the president, demanded an adjournment. It did seem as if “the stars in their courses” were fighting against the primate. On the first occasion on which he summoned Wicliffe before him, the populace forced their way into the hall, and the court broke up in confusion. The same thing happened over again on the second occasion on which Wicliffe came to his bar; a popular tempest broke over the court, and the judges were driven from the judgment-seat. A third time Wicliffe is summoned, and the court meets in a place where it was easier to take precautions against interference from the populace, when lo! the ground is suddenly rocked by an earthquake. But Courtenay had now got his pall from Rome, and was above these weak fears. So turning to his brother judges, he delivered to them a short homily on the earthly uses and mystic meanings of earthquakes, and bade them be of good courage and go on. “This earthquake,” said he, “portends the purging of the kingdom from heresies. For as there are shut up in the bowels of the earth many noxious spirits, which are expelled in an earthquake, and so the earth is cleansed, but not without great violence: so there are many heresies shut up in the hearts of reprobate men, but by the condemnation of them the kingdom is to be cleansed, but not without irksomeness and great commotion.”¹⁰ The court accepting, on the archbishop's authority, the earthquake as a good omen, went on with the trial of Wicliffe.

⁸ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 97. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 89.

⁹ “Here is not to be passed over the great miracle of God's Divine admonition or warning, for when as the archbishops and suffragans, with the other doctors of divinity and lawyers, with a great company of babbling friars and religious persons, were gathered together to consult touching John Wicliffe's books, and that whole sect; when, as I say, they were gathered together at the Grayfriars in London, to begin their business, upon St. Dunstan's day after dinner, about two of the clock, the very hour and instant that they should go forward with their business, a wonderful and terrible earthquake fell throughout all England.” (Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 570.)

¹⁰ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, pp. 106, 107. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 570.

An officer of the court read out twenty-six propositions selected from the writings of the Reformer. The court sat three days in “good deliberation” over them.¹¹ It unanimously condemned ten of them as heretical, and the remainder as erroneous. Among those specially branded as heresies, were the propositions relating to transubstantiation, the temporal emoluments of the hierarchy, and the supremacy of the Pope, which last Wicliffe admitted might be deduced from the emperor, but certainly not from Christ. The sentence of the court was sent to the Bishop of London and all his brethren, the suffragans of the diocese of Canterbury, as also to the Bishop of Lincoln, Wicliffe’s diocesan, accompanied by the commands of Courtenay, as “Primate of all England,” that they should look to it that these pestiferous doctrines were not taught in their dioceses.¹²

Besides these two missives, a third was dispatched to the University of Oxford, which was, in the primate’s eyes, nothing better than a hot-bed of heresy. The chancellor, William de Barton, who presided over the court that condemned Wicliffe the year before, was dead, and his office was now filled by Robert Rigge, who was friendly to the Reformer. Among the professors and students were many who had imbibed the sentiments of Wicliffe, and needed to be warned against the “venomous serpent,” to whose seductions they had already begun to listen. When the primate saw that his counsel did not find the ready ear which he thought it entitled to from that learned body, but that, on the contrary, they continued to toy with the danger, he resolved to save them in spite of themselves. He carried his complaint to the young king, Richard II. “If we permit this heretic,” said he, “to appeal continually to the passions of the people, our destruction is inevitable; we must silence these lollards.”¹³ The king was gained over. He gave authority “to confine in the prisons of the State any who should maintain the condemned propositions.”¹⁴

The Reformation was advancing, but it appeared at this moment as if the Reformer was on the eve of being crushed. He had many friends—every day was adding to their number—but they lacked courage, and remained in the background. His lectures at Oxford had planted the Gospel in the schools, the Bible which he had translated was planting it in the homes of England. But if the disciples of the Reformation multiplied, so too did the foes of the Reformer. The hierarchy had all along withstood and persecuted him, now the mailed hand of the king was raised to strike him.

When this was seen, all his friends fell away from him. John of Gaunt had deserted him at an earlier stage. This prince stood stoutly by Wicliffe so long as the Reformer occupied himself in simply repelling encroachments of the hierarchy upon the prerogatives of the

¹¹ Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 91.

¹² Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 569. Knighton, *De Event. Angliae*, cols. 2650, 2651.

¹³ Many derivations have been found for this word; the following is the most probable:—“*Lollen*, or *lullen*, signifies to sing with a low voice. It is yet used in the same sense among the English, who say *lull a-sleep*, which signifies to sing any one into a slumber. The word is also used in the same sense among the Flemings, Swedes, and other nations. Among the Germans both the sense and the pronunciation of it have undergone some alteration, for they say *lallen*, which signifies to pronounce indistinctly or stammer. *Lolhard* therefore is a singer, or one who frequently sings.” (Mosheim, cent. 14, pt. ii., s. 36, foot-note.)

¹⁴ Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, p. 113. D’Aubigné, *Hist. of Reform.*, vol. v., p. 130; Edin., 1853. Cobbett, *Parl. Hist.*, vol. i., col. 177. Fox calls this the first law for burning the professors of religion. It was made by the clergy without the knowledge or consent of the Commons, in the fifth year of Richard II.

crown and independence of the nation. That was a branch of the controversy the duke could understand. But when it passed into the doctrinal sphere, when the bold Reformer, not content with cropping off a few excrescences, began to lay the axe to the root—to deny the Sacrament and abolish the altar—the valiant prince was alarmed; he felt that he had stepped on ground which he did not know, and that he was in danger of being drawn into a bottomless pit of heresy. John of Gaunt, therefore, made all haste to draw off. But others too, of whom better things might have been expected, quailed before the gathering storm, and stood aloof from the Reformer. Dr. Nicholas Hereford, who had aided him in translating the Old Testament, and John Ashton, the most eloquent of those preachers whom Wicliffe had sent forth to traverse England, consulted their own safety rather than the defence of their leader, and the honour of the cause they had espoused.¹⁵ This conduct doubtless grieved, but did not dismay Wicliffe. Not an iota of heart or hope did he abate therefore. Nay, he chose this moment to make a forward movement, and to aim more terrible blows at the Papacy than any he had yet dealt it.

¹⁵ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 579. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., pp. 109, 110.

Chapter XII.

Wicliffe's Appeal to Parliament.

Parliament meets—Wicliffe appears, and demands a Sweeping Reform—His Propositions touching the Monastic Orders—The Church's Temporalities – Transubstantiation—His growing Boldness—His Views find an echo in Parliament—The Persecuting Edict Repealed.

The Parliament met on the 19th November, 1382.¹ Wicliffe could now prosecute his appeal to the king against the sentence of the university court, condemning his twelve propositions. But the prelates had been beforehand with him. They had inveigled the sovereign into lending them the sword of the State to wield at will against Wicliffe, and against all who should doubt the tremendous mystery of transubstantiation. Well, they might burn him to-morrow, but he lived to-day, and the doors of Parliament stood open. Wicliffe made haste to enter with his appeal and complaint. The hierarchy had secretly accused him to the king, he openly arraigns them before the Estates of the Realm.

The complaint presented by Wicliffe touched on four heads, and on each it demanded a very sweeping measure of reform. The first grievance to be abated or abolished was the monastic orders. The Reformer demanded that they should be released from the unnatural and immoral vow which made them the scandal of the Church, and the pests of society. "Since Jesus Christ shed his blood to free his Church," said Wicliffe, "I demand its freedom. I demand that every one may leave these gloomy walls [the convents] within which a tyrannical law prevails, and embrace a simple and peaceful life under the open vault of heaven."

The second part of the complaint had reference to the temporalities of the Church. The corruption and inefficiency of the clergy, Wicliffe traced largely to their enormous wealth. That the clergy themselves would surrender these overgrown revenues he did not expect; he called, therefore, for the interference of the State, holding, despite the opposite doctrine promulgated by the priests, that both the property and persons of the priesthood were under the jurisdiction of the king. "Magistracy," he affirms, is "God's ordinance;" and he remarks that the Apostle Paul, "who putteth all men in subjection to kings, taketh out never a one." And analogous to this was the third part of the paper, which related to tithes and offerings. Let these, said Wicliffe, be remodelled. Let tithes and offerings be on a scale which shall be amply sufficient for the support of the recipients in the discharge of their sacred duties, but not such as to minister to their luxury and pride; and if a priest shall be found to be indolent or vicious, let neither tithe nor offering be given him. "I demand," he said, "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 and his licentiousness—of buying a showy horse, costly saddles, bridles with tinkling bells, rich garments and soft furs, while they see the wives and children of their neighbours dying of hunger."²

¹ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 580.

² Vaughan, vol. ii., p. 125. *A Complaint of John Wicliffe: Tracts and Treatises* edited by the Wicliffe Society, p. 268.

The last part of the paper went deeper. It touched on doctrine, and on that doctrine which occupies a central place in the Romish system—transubstantiation. His own views on the dogma he did not particularly define in this appeal to Parliament, though he did so a little while after before the Convocation; he contented himself with craving liberty to have the true doctrine of the Eucharist, as given by Christ and his apostles, taught throughout England. In his *Trialogus*, which was composed about this time, he takes a luminous view of the dogma of transubstantiation. Its effects, he believed, were peculiarly mischievous and far-extending. Not only was it an error, it was an error which enfeebled the understanding of the man who embraced it, and shook his confidence in the testimony of his senses, and so prepared the way for any absurdity or error, however much in opposition to reason or even to sense. The doctrine of the “real presence,” understood in a corporeal sense, he declares to be the offspring of Satan, whom he pictures as reasoning thus while inventing it: “Should I once so far beguile the faithful of the Church, by the aid of Antichrist my vicegerent, as to persuade them to deny that this Sacrament is bread, and to induce them to regard it as merely an accident, there will be nothing then which I will not bring them to receive, since there can be nothing more opposite to the Scriptures, or to common discernment. Let the life of a prelate be then what it may, let him be guilty of luxury, simony, or murder, the people may be led to believe that he is really no such man—nay, they may then be persuaded to admit that the Pope is infallible, at least with respect to matters of Christian faith; and that, inasmuch as he is known by the name Most Holy Father, he is of course free from sin.”³ “It thus appears,” says Dr. Vaughan, commenting on the above, “that the object of Wicliffe was to restore the mind of man to the legitimate guidance of reason and of the senses, in the study of Holy Writ, and in judging of every Christian institute and that if the doctrine of transubstantiation proved peculiarly obnoxious to him, it was because that dogma was seen as in the most direct opposition to this generous design. To him it appeared that while the authority of the Church was so far submitted to as to involve the adoption of this monstrous tenet, no limit could possibly be assigned to the schemes of clerical imposture and oppression.”

The enemies of the Reformer must have been confounded by this bold attack. They had persuaded themselves that the hour was come when Wicliffe must yield. Hereford, Repingdon, Ashton—all his friends, one after the other, had reconciled themselves to the hierarchy. The priests waited to see Wicliffe come forward, last of all, and bow his majestic head, and then they would lead him about in chains as a trophy of their victory, and a proof of the complete suppression of the movement of Reform. He comes forward, but not to retract, not even to apologise, but with heart which grows only the stouter as his years increase and his enemies multiply, to reiterate his charges and again to proclaim in the face of the whole nation the corruption, tyranny, and errors of the hierarchy. His sentiments found an echo in the Commons, and Parliament repealed the persecuting edict

³ *Trialogus*, lib. iv., cap. 7. Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 131. “Hoc sacramentum venerabile,” says Wicliffe, “est in natura sua verus panis et sacramentaliter corpus Christi” (*Trialogus*, p. 192)—*naturally* it is bread, sacramentally it is the body of Christ. “By this distinction,” says Sharon Turner, “he removed from the most venerated part of religious worship the great provocative to infidelity; and preserved the English mind from that absolute rejection of Christianity which the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation has, since the thirteenth century, been so fatally producing in every country where it predominates, even among many of its teachers.” (*Hist. of Eng.*, vol. v., pp. 182, 183.)

which the priests and the king had surreptitiously passed. Thus the gain remained with Wicliffe.

Chapter XIII.

Wicliffe Before Convocation in Person, and Before the Roman Curia by Letter.

Convocation at Oxford—Wicliffe cited—Arraigned on the Question of Transubstantiation—Wicliffe Maintains and Reiterates the Teaching of his whole Life—He Arraigns his Judges—They are Dismayed—Wicliffe Retires Unmolested—Returns to Lutterworth—Cited by Urban VI. to Rome—Unable to go—Sends a Letter—A Faithful Admonition—Scene in the Vatican—Christ's and Antichrist's Portraits.

Baffled before the Parliament, the primate turned to Convocation. Here he could more easily reckon on a subservient court. Courtenay had taken care to assemble a goodly number of clergy to give éclat to the trial, and to be the spectators, as he fondly hoped, of the victory that awaited him. There were, besides the primate, six bishops, many doctors in divinity, and a host of inferior clergy. The concourse was swelled by the dignitaries and youth of Oxford. The scene where the trial took place must have recalled many memories to Wicliffe which could not but deeply stir him. It was now forty years since he had entered Oxford as a scholar; these halls had witnessed the toils of his youth and the labours of his manhood. Here had the most brilliant of his achievements been performed; here had his name been mentioned with honour, and his renown as a man of erudition and genius formed not the least constituent in the glory of his university. But this day Oxford opened her venerable gates to receive him in a new character. He came to be tried, perchance to be condemned; and, if his judges were able, to be delivered over to the civil power and punished as a heretic. The issue of the affair might be that that same Oxford which had borrowed a lustre from his name would be lit up with the flames of his martyrdom.

The indictment turned specially upon transubstantiation. Did he affirm or deny that cardinal doctrine of the Church? The Reformer raised his venerable head in presence of the vast assembly; his eyes sought out Courtenay, the archbishop, on whom he fixed a steady and searching gaze, and proceeded. In this, his last address before any court, he retracts nothing; he modifies nothing; he reiterates and confirms the whole teaching of his life on the question of the Eucharist. His address abounded in distinctions after the manner of that scholastic age, but it extorted praise for its unrivalled acuteness even from those who dissented from it. Throughout it Wicliffe unmistakably condemns the tenet of transubstantiation, affirming that the bread still continues bread, that there is no fleshly presence of Christ in the Sacrament, nor other presence save a *sacramental* and *spiritual* one.¹

¹ Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., chap. 4. Wicliffe gave in two defences or confessions to Convocation: one in Latin, suited to the taste of the learned, and characterised by the nice distinctions and subtle logic of the schools; the other in English, and adapted to the understandings of the common people. In both Wicliffe unmistakably repudiates transubstantiation. Those who have said that Wicliffe before the Convocation modified or retracted opinions he had formerly avowed, have misrepresented him, or, more probably, have misunderstood his statements and reasonings. He defends himself with the subtlety of a schoolman, but he retracts nothing; on the contrary, he re-asserts the precise doctrine for which William

Wicliffe had defended himself with a rare acuteness, and with a courage yet more rare. But acquittal he will neither crave nor accept from such a court. In one of those transformations which it is given to only majestic moral natures to effect, he mounts the judgment-seat and places his judges at the bar. Smitten in their consciences, they sat chained to their seats, deprived of the power to rise and go away, although the words of the bold Reformer must have gone like burning arrows to their heart. "They were the heretics," he said, "who affirmed that the Sacrament was an accident without a subject. Why did they propagate such errors? Why, because, like the priests of Baal, they wanted to vend their masses. With whom, think you," he asked in closing, "are ye contending? with an old man on the brink of the grave? No! with Truth—Truth which is stronger than you, and will overcome you."² With these words he turned to leave the court. His enemies had not power to stop him. "Like his Divine Master at Nazareth," says D'Aubigné, "he passed through the midst of them."³ Leaving Oxford, he retired to his cure at Lutterworth.

Wicliffe must bear testimony at Rome also. It was Pope Urban, not knowing what he did, who arranged that the voice of this great witness, before becoming finally silent, should be heard speaking from the Seven Hills. One day about this time, as he was toiling with his pen in his quiet rectory—for his activity increased as his infirmities multiplied, and the night drew on in which he could not work—he received a summons from the Pontiff to repair to Rome, and answer for his heresy before the Papal See. Had he gone thither he certainly would never have returned. But that was not the consideration that weighed with Wicliffe. The hand of God had laid an arrest upon him. He had had a shock of palsy, and, had he attempted a journey so toilsome, would have died on the way long before he could have reached the gates of the Pontifical city. But though he could not go to Rome in person, he could go by letter, and thus the ends of Providence, if not the ends of Urban, would be equally served. The Pontiff and his conclave and, in short, all Christendom were to have another warning—another call to repentance addressed to them before the Reformer should descend into the tomb.

John Wicliffe sat down in his rectory to speak, across intervening mountains and seas, to Urban of Rome. Than the epistle of the Rector of Lutterworth to the Pontiff of Christendom nothing can be imagined keener in its satire, yet nothing could have been more Christian and faithful in its spirit. Assuming Urban to be what Urban held himself to be, Wicliffe went on to say that there was no one before whom he could so joyfully appear as before Christ's Vicar, for by no one could he expect Christ's law to be more revered, or Christ's Gospel more loved. At no tribunal could he expect greater equity than that before which he now stood, and therefore if he had strayed from the Gospel, he was sure here to have his error proved to him, and the path of truth pointed out. The Vicar of Christ, he quietly assumes, does not affect the greatness of this world; oh, no; he leaves its pomps and vanities to worldly men, and contenting himself with the lowly estate of Him who, while on earth had not where to lay his head, he seeks no glory save the glory of resembling his Master. The "worldly lordship" he is compelled to bear is, he is sure, an

de Berton's court had condemned him, and in the very terms in which he had formerly stated that doctrine. (See Appendix in Vaughan. Nos. 1, 2.)

² *Confessio Magistri Johannis Wycliff*—Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., Appendix, No. 6.

³ D'Aubigné, *Hist. of Reform.*, vol. v., p. 132; Edin., 1853.

unwelcome burden, of which he is fain to be rid. The Holy Father ceases not, doubtless, to exhort all his priests throughout Christendom to follow herein his own example, and to feed with the Bread of Life the flocks committed to their care. The Reformer closes by reiterating his willingness, if in aught he had erred, “to be meekly amended, if needs be, by death.”⁴

We can easily imagine the scowling faces amid which this letter was opened and read in the Vatican. Had Wicliffe indulged in vituperative terms, those to whom this epistle was addressed would have felt only assailed; as it was, they were arraigned, they felt themselves standing at the bar of the Reformer. With severe and truthful hand Wicliffe draws the portrait of Him whose servants Urban and his cardinals professed to be, and holding it up full in their sight, he asks, “Is this your likeness? Is this the poverty in which you live? Is this the humility you cultivate?” With the monuments of their pride on every hand—their palaces, their estates, their gay robes, their magnificent equipages, their luxurious tables—their tyranny the scourge and their lives the scandal of Christendom—they dared not say, “This is our likeness.” Thus were they condemned: but it was Christ who had condemned them. This was all that Urban had gained by summoning Wicliffe before him. He had but erected a pulpit on the Seven Hills, from the lofty elevation of which the English Reformer was able to proclaim, in the hearing of all the nations of Europe, that Rome was the Antichrist.

⁴ *Dr. Wicliffe's Letter of Excuse to Urban VI.*-Bibl. Bodl. MS.—Lewis, *Life of Wiclif*, Appendix, No. 23. Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 507; edit. 1684.

Chapter XIV.

Wicliffe's Last Days.

Anticipation of a Violent Death—Wonderfully Shielded by Events—Struck with Palsy—Dies December 31st, 1384—Estimate of his Position and Work—Completeness of his Scheme of Reform—The Father of the Reformation—The Founder of England's Liberties.

When Wicliffe had indited and dispatched this letter, he had "finished his testimony." It now remained only that he should rest a little while on earth, and then go up to his everlasting rest. He himself expected that his death would be by violence—that the chariot which should carry him to the skies would be a "chariot of fire." The primate, the king, the Pope, all were working to compass his destruction; he saw the iron circle contracting day by day around him; a few months, or a few years, and it would close and crush him. That a man who defied the whole hierarchy, and who never gave way by so much as a foot-breadth, but was always pressing on in the battle, should die at last, not in a dungeon or at a stake, but in his own bed, was truly a marvel. He stood alone; he did not consult for his safety. But his very courage, in the hand of God, was his shield; for while meaner men were apprehended and compelled to recant, Wicliffe, who would burn but not recant, was left at liberty. "He that loveth his life shall lose it." The political troubles of England, the rivalry of the two Popes, one event after another came to protect the life and prolong the labours of the Reformer, till his work attained at last a unity, a completeness, and a grandeur, which the more we contemplate it appears the more admirable. That it was the fixed purpose of his enemies to destroy him cannot be doubted; they thought they saw the opportune moment coming. But while they waited for it, and thought that now it was near, Wicliffe had departed, and was gone whither they could not follow.

On the last Sunday of the year 1384, he was to have dispensed the Eucharist to his beloved flock in the parish church of Lutterworth; and as he was in the act of consecrating the bread and wine, he was struck with palsy, and fell on the pavement. This was the third attack of the malady. He was affectionately borne to the rectory, laid on his bed, and died on the 31st of December, his life and the year closing together. How fitting a conclusion to his noble life! None of its years, scarcely any of its days, were passed unprofitably on the bed of sickness. The moment his great work was finished, that moment the Voice spake to him which said, "Come up hither." As he stood before the earthly symbols of his Lord's passion, a cloud suddenly descended upon him; and when its darkness had passed, and the light had returned, serener and more bright than ever was dawn or noon of earthly day, it was no memorial or symbol that he saw; it was his Lord Himself, in the august splendour of His glorified humanity. Blessed transition! The earthly sanctuary, whose gates he had that morning entered, became to him the vestibule of the Eternal Temple; and the Sabbath, whose services he had just commenced, became the dawn of a better Sabbath, to be closed by no evening with its shadows, and followed by no week-day with its toils.

If we can speak of one centre where the light which is spreading over the earth, and which is destined one day to illuminate it all, originally arose, that centre is England. And if to one man the honour of beginning that movement which is renewing the world can be

ascribed beyond controversy, that man is John Wicliffe. He came out of the darkness of the Middle Ages—a sort of Melchisedek. He had no predecessor from whom he borrowed his plan of Church reform, and he had no successor in his office when he died; for it was not till more than 100 years that any other stood up in England to resume the work broken off by his death. Wicliffe stands apart, distinctly marked off from all the men in Christendom. Bursting suddenly upon a dark age, he stands before it in a light not borrowed from the schools, nor from the doctors of the Church, but from the Bible. He came preaching a scheme of re-institution and reformation so comprehensive, that no Reformer since has been able to add to it any one essential principle. On these solid grounds he is entitled to be regarded as the Father of the Reformation. With his rise the night of Christendom came to an end, and the day broke which has ever since continued to brighten.

Wicliffe possessed that combination of opposite qualities which marks the great man. As subtle as any schoolman of them all, he was yet as practical as any Englishman of the nineteenth century. With intuitive insight he penetrated to the root of all the evils that afflicted England, and with rare practical sagacity he devised and set a-going the true remedies. The evil he saw was ignorance, the remedy with which he sought to cure it was light. He translated the Bible, and he organised a body of preachers—simple, pious, earnest men—who knew the Gospel, and were willing to preach it at crossroads and in marketplaces, in city and village and rural lane—everywhere, in short. Before he died he saw that his labours had been successful to a degree he had not dared to hope. “His doctrine spread,” said Knighton, his bitter enemy, “like suckers from the root of a tree,” Wicliffe himself reckoned that a third of the priests of England were of his sentiment on the question of the Eucharist; and among the common people his disciples were innumerable. “You could not meet two men on the highway,” said his enemies, “but one of them is a Wicliffite.”¹

The political measures which Parliament adopted at Wicliffe's advice, to guard the country against the usurpations of the Popes, show how deeply he saw into the constitution of the Papacy, as a political and worldly confederacy, wearing a spiritual guise only the better to conceal its true character and to gain its real object, which was to prey on the substance and devour the liberty of nations. Matters were rapidly tending to a sacerdotal autocracy. Christendom was growing into a kingdom of shorn and anointed men, with laymen as hewers of wood and drawers of water. Wicliffe said, “This shall not be;” and the best proof of his statesmanship is the fact that since his day all the other States of Europe, one after the other, have adopted the same measures of defence to which England had recourse in the fourteenth century. All of them, following in our wake, have passed laws to guard their throne, to regulate the appointment of bishops, to prevent the accumulation of property by religious houses, to restrict the introduction of bulls and briefs. They have done, in short, what we did, though to less advantage, because they did it later in the day. England foresaw the evil and took precautions in time; other countries suffered it to come, and began to protect themselves only after it had all but effected their undoing.

¹ Knighton. *De Eventibus Angliae*, col. 2663, 2665.

It was under Wicliffe that English liberty had its beginnings. It is not the political constitution which has come out of the Magna Charta of King John and the barons, but the moral constitution which came out of that Divine MAGNA CHARTA, that Wicliffe gave her in the fourteenth century, which has been the sheet-anchor of England. The English Bible wrote, not merely upon the page of the Statute Book, but upon the hearts of the people of England, the two great commandments: Fear God; honour the king. These two sum up the whole duty of nations, and on these two hangs the prosperity of States. There is no mysterious or latent virtue in our political constitution which, as some seem to think, like a good genius protects us, and with invisible hand guides past our shores the tempests that cover other countries with the memorials of their devastating fury. The real secret of England's greatness is her permeation, at the very dawn of her history, with the principles of order and liberty by means of the English Bible, and the capacity for freedom thereby created. This has permitted the development, by equal stages, of our love for freedom and our submission to law; of our political constitution and our national genius; of our power and our self-control—the two sets of qualities fitting into one another, and growing into a well-compacted fabric of political and moral power unexampled on earth. If nowhere else is seen a similar structure, so stable and so lofty, it is because nowhere else has a similar basis been found for it. It was Wicliffe who laid that basis.

But above all his other qualities—above his scholastic genius, his intuitive insight into the working of institutions, his statesmanship—was his fearless submission to the Bible. It was in this that the strength of Wicliffe's wisdom lay. It was this that made him a Reformer, and that placed him in the first rank of Reformers. He held the Bible to contain a perfect revelation of the will of God, a full, plain, and infallible rule of both what man is to believe and what he is to do; and turning away from all other teachers, from the precedents of the thousand years which had gone before, from all the doctors and Councils of the Church, he placed himself before the Word of God, and bowed to God's voice speaking in that Word, with the docility of a child.

And the authority to which he himself so implicitly bowed, he called on all men to submit to. His aim was to bring men back to the Bible. The Reformer restored to the Church, first of all, the principle of authority. There must be a Divine and infallible authority in the Church. That authority cannot be the Church herself, for the guide and those whom he guides cannot be the same. The Divine infallible authority which Wicliffe restored for the guidance of men was the Bible—God speaking in his Word. And by setting up this Divine authority he displaced that human and fallible authority which the corruption of the ages had imposed upon the Church. He turned the eyes of men from Popes and Councils to the inspired oracles of God.²

Wicliffe, by restoring *authority* to the Church, restored to her *liberty* also. While he taught that the Bible was a sufficient and all-perfect rule, he taught also that every man had a right to interpret the Word of God for his own guidance, in a dependence upon the promised aid of the Holy Spirit. Thus he taught men to cast off that blind submission to

² “The Bible is the foundation deed of the Church, its charter: Wicliffe likes, with allusion to the Magna Charta, the fundamental deed of the civic liberty of his nation, to designate the Bible as the letter of freedom of the Church, as the deed of grace and promise given by God.” (Lechler, *De Ecclesia*.)

the teaching of mere human authority, which is bondage, and to submit their understandings and consciences to God speaking in his Word, which alone is liberty.

These are the two first necessities of the Church of God—*authority* and *liberty*; an infallible Guide, and freedom to follow him. These two must ever go together, the one cannot exist without the other. Without authority there can be no liberty, for liberty without order becomes anarchy; and without freedom there can be no Divine authority, for if the Church is not at liberty to obey the will of her Master, authority is overthrown. In the room of the rule of God is put the usurpation of man. Authority and freedom, like the twins of classic story, must together flourish or together die.

Chapter XV.

Wicliffe's Theological and Church System.

His Theology drawn from the Bible solely—His Teaching embraced the Following Doctrines: The Fall—Man's Inability—Did not formulate his Views into a System—His "Postils"—His Views on Church Order and Government—Apostolic Arrangements his Model—His Personal Piety—Lechler's Estimate of him as a Reformer.

Standing before the Bible, Wicliffe forgot all the teaching of man. For centuries before his day the human mind had been busy in the field of theology. Systems had been invented and built up; the glosses of doctors, the edicts of Councils, and the bulls of Popes had been piled one above the other till the structure looked imposing indeed. Wicliffe dug down through it all till he came to the first foundations, to those even which the hands of prophets and apostles had laid. Hence the apostolic simplicity and purity of his doctrine.¹ With all the early Fathers he gave prominence to the free grace of God in the matter of man's salvation; in fact, he ascribed it entirely to grace. He taught that man was fallen through Adam's transgression; that he was utterly unable to do the will of God, or to merit Divine favour or forgiveness, by his own power. He taught the eternal Godhead of Christ—very God and very man; his substitution in the room of the guilty; his work of obedience; his sacrifice upon the cross, and the free justification of the sinner through faith in that sacrifice. "Here we must know," says he, "the story of the old law. . . . As a right looking on that adder of brass saved the people from the venom of serpents, so a right looking by full belief on Christ saveth his people. Christ died not for his own sins as thieves do for theirs, but as our Brother, who himself might not sin, he died for the sins that others had done."²

What Wicliffe did in the field of theology was not to compile a system, but to give a plain exposition of Scripture; to restore to the eyes of men, from whom they had long been hidden, those truths which are for the healing of their souls. He left it for those who should come after him to formulate the doctrines which he deduced from the inspired page. Traversing the field of revelation, he plucked its flowers all fresh as they grew, regaling himself and his flock therewith, but bestowing no pains on their classification.

Of the sermons, or "postils," of Wicliffe, some 300 remain. The most of these have now been given to the world through the press, and they enable us to estimate with accuracy the depth and comprehensiveness of the Reformer's views. The men of the sixteenth century had not the materials for judging which we possess; and their estimate of Wicliffe as a theologian, we humbly think, did him no little injustice. Melancthon, for instance, in a letter to Myconius, declared him to be ignorant of the "righteousness of

¹ Above all, Wicliffe holds up to view that the preaching of the Word of God is that instrumentality which very specially serves to the edification of the Church, because God's Word is seed (Luke viii. 11). "Oh, astonishing power of the Divine seed," exclaims Wicliffe, "which conquers the strong-armed man, softens hard hearts, and renews and changes into godly men those who have become brutalised by sin, and wandered to an infinite distance from God! Evidently no priest's word could work such a great wonder, if the Spirit of Life and the Eternal Word did not co-operate." (Lechler, vol. i., p. 395.)

² Vaughan, *Life of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., p. 356.

faith.” This judgment is excusable in the circumstances in which it was formed; but it is not the less untrue, for the passages adduced above make it unquestionable that Wicliffe both knew and taught the doctrine of God’s grace, and of man’s free justification through faith in the righteousness of Christ.³ The early models of Church government and order Wicliffe also dug up from underneath the rubbish of thirteen centuries. He maintained that the Church was made up of the whole body of the faithful; he discarded the idea that the clergy alone are the Church; the laity, he held, are equally an essential part of it; nor ought there to be, he held, among its ministers, gradation of rank or official pre-eminence. The indolence, pride, and dissensions which reigned among the clergy of his day, he viewed as arising from violation of the law of the Gospel, which declares “it were better for the clerks to be all of one estate.” “From the faith of the Scriptures,” says he in his *Trialogus*, “it seems to me to be sufficient that there should be presbyters and deacons holding that state and office which Christ has imposed on them, since it appears certain that these degrees and orders have their origin in the pride of Caesar.” And again he observes, “I boldly assert one thing, namely, that in the primitive Church, or in the time of Paul, two orders of the clergy were sufficient—that is, a priest and a deacon. In like manner I affirm that in the time of Paul, the presbyter and bishop were names of the same office. This appears from the third chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy, and in the first chapter of the Epistle to Titus,”⁴

As regards the claims of the clergy alone to form the Church, and to wield ecclesiastical power, Wicliffe thus expresses himself: “When men speak of Holy Church, anon, they understand prelates and priests, with monks, and canons, and friars, and all men who have tonsures, though they live accursedly, and never so contrary to the law of God. But they call not the seculars men of Holy Church, though they live never so truly, according to God’s law, and die in perfect charity. . . . Christian men, taught in God’s law, call Holy Church the congregation of just men, for whom Jesus Christ shed his blood, and not mere stones and timber and earthly dross, which the clerks of Antichrist magnify more than the righteousness of God, and the souls of men.”⁵ Before Wicliffe could form these opinions he had to forget the age in which he lived, and place himself in the midst of apostolic times; he had to emancipate himself from the prestige which a venerable antiquity gave to the institutions around him, and seek his model and principles in the Word of God. It was an act of stupendous obedience done in faith, but by that act he became the pioneer of the Reformation, and the father of all those, in any age or country, who confess that, in their efforts after Reformation, they seek a “City” which hath its “foundations” in the teachings of prophets and apostles, and whose “Builder and Maker” is the Spirit of God. “That whole circle of questions,” says Dr. Hanna, “concerning the canon of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and the right of private interpretation of Scripture, with which the later controversies of the Reformation have made us so familiar, received their first treatment in this country at Wicliffe’s hands. In conducting this fundamental controversy,

³ The same excuse cannot be made for Dorner. His brief estimate of the great English Reformer is not made, with his usual discrimination, scarce with his usual fairness. He says: “The deeper spirit is wanting in his ideas of reform.” “He does not yet know the nature of justification, and does not yet know the free grace of God.” (*History of Protestant Theology*, vol. i., p. 66; Edin., 1871.)

⁴ Vaughan, *Life, of John de Wicliffe*, vol. ii., pp. 309, 310.

⁵ *Sentence of the Curse Expounded*, chap. 2.

Wicliffe had to lay all the foundations with his own unaided hand. And it is no small praise to render to his work to say that it was even as he laid them, line for line, and stone for stone, that they were relaid by the master builders of the Reformation.”⁶

Of his personal piety there can be no doubt. There remain, it is true, scarce any memorials, written or traditional, of his private life; but his public history is an enduring monument of his personal Christianity. Such a life nothing could have sustained save a deep conviction of the truth, a firm trust in God, a love to the Saviour, and an ardent desire for the salvation of men. His private character, we know, was singularly pure; none of the vices of the age had touched him; as a pastor he was loving and faithful, and as a patriot he was enlightened, incorruptible, and courageous. His friends fell away, but the Reformer never hesitated, never wavered. His views continued to grow, and his magnanimity and zeal grew with them. Had he sought fame, or wealth, or promotion, he could not but have seen that he had taken the wrong road: privation and continual sacrifice only could he expect in the path he had chosen. He acted on the maxim which he taught to others, that “if we look for an earthly reward our hope of eternal life perisheth.”

His sermons afford us a glimpse into his study at Lutterworth, and show us how his hours there were passed, even in meditation on God’s Word, and communion with its Author. These are remarkable productions, expressed in vigorous rudimentary English, with no mystic haze in their thinking, disencumbered from the phraseology of the schools, simple and clear as the opening day, and fragrant as the breath of morning. They burst suddenly upon us like a ray of pure light from the very heart of the darkness, telling us that God’s Word in all ages is Light, and that the Holy Spirit has ever been present in the Church to discharge his office of leading “into all truth” those who are willing to submit their minds to his guidance.

“If we look from Wicliffe,” says Lechler, “backwards, in order to compare him with the men before him, and arrive at a scale of measurement for his own power, the fact is brought before us that Wicliffe concentratedly represented that movement towards reform of the foregoing centuries, which the degeneracy of the Church, arising from its secular possessions and simonies, rendered necessary. That which, in Gregory VII.’s time, Arnold of Brescia, and the community of the Waldenses, Francis of Assisi, and the begging orders of the Minorites strove after, what the holy Bernard of Clairvaux longed for, the return of the Church to apostolic order, that filled Wicliffe’s soul specially at the beginning of his public career. . . . In the collective history of the Church of Christ Wicliffe makes an epoch, in so far as he is the first reforming personality. Before him arose, it is true, here and there many schemes and active endeavours, which led also to dissensions and collisions, and ultimately to the formation of separate communities; but Wicliffe is the first important personality who devoted himself to the work of Church reform with the whole bent of his mind, with all the thinking power of a superior intellect, and the full force of will and joyful self-devotion of a man in Christ Jesus. He worked at this his life long, out of an earnest, conscientious impulse, and in the confident trust that the work is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 58). He did not conceal from himself that the endeavours of evangelical men would in the first place be combatted, persecuted, and repressed.

⁶ Hanna, *Wicliffe and the Huguenots*, p. 116.

Notwithstanding this, he consoled himself with the thought that it would yet come in the end to a renewing of the Church according to the apostolic pattern.”

“How far Wicliffe’s thoughts have been, first of all, rightly understood, faithfully preserved, and practically valued, till at last all that was true and well proved in them deepened and strengthened, and were finally established in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, must be proved by the history of the following generations.”⁷

Wicliffe, had he lived two centuries later, would very probably have been to England what Luther was to Germany, and Knox to Scotland. His appearance in the fourteenth century enabled him to discharge an office that in some respects was higher, and to fill a position that is altogether unique in the religious history of Christendom. With Wicliffe the world changes from stagnancy to progress. Wicliffe introduces the era of moral revivals. He was the Forerunner of all the Reformers, and the Father of all the Reformations of Christendom.

⁷ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif*, vol. ii., pp. 741, 742.