

HISTORY
OF THE
REFORMATION
OF THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

VOLUME FIRST.

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[THREE CHAPTERS ON JOHN WICKLIFFE.]

CHAPTER VII.

The Mendicant Friars—Their Disorders and Popular Indignation—Wickliffe—His Success—Speeches of the Peers against the Papal Tribute—Agreement of Bruges—Courtenay and Lancaster—Wickliffe before the Convocation—Altercation between Lancaster and Courtenay—Riot—Three Briefs against Wickliffe—Wickliffe at Lambeth—Mission of the Poor Priests—Their Preachings and Persecutions—Wickliffe and the Four Regents.

THUS in the first half of the fourteenth century, nearly two hundred years before the Reformation, England appeared weary of the yoke of Rome. Bradwardine was no more; but a man who had been his disciple was about to succeed him, and without attaining to the highest functions, to exhibit in his person the past and future tendencies of the church of Christ in Great Britain. The English Reformation did not begin with Henry VIII.: the revival of the sixteenth century is but a link in the chain commencing with the apostles and reaching to us.

The resistance of Edward III. to the papacy *without* had not suppressed the papacy *within*. The mendicant friars, and particularly the Franciscans, those fanatical soldiers of the pope, were endeavouring by pious frauds to monopolize the wealth of the country. "Every year," said they, "Saint Francis descends from heaven to purgatory, and delivers the souls of all those who were buried in the dress of his order." These friars used to kidnap children from their parents and shut them up in monasteries. They affected to be poor, and with a wallet on their back, begged with a piteous air from both high and low; but at the same time they dwelt in palaces, heaped up treasures, dressed in costly garments, and wasted their time in luxurious entertainments.¹ The least of them looked upon themselves as lord, and those who wore the doctor's cap considered themselves king. While they diverted themselves, eating and drinking at their well-spread tables, they used to send ignorant uneducated persons in their place to

¹ When they have overmuch riches, both in great waste houses and precious clothes, in great feasts and many jewels and treasures. Wickliffe's Tracts and Treatises, edited by the Wickliffe Society, p. 224.

preach fables and legends to amuse and plunder the people.¹ If any rich man talked of giving alms to the poor and not to the monks, they exclaimed loudly against such impiety, and declared with threatening voice: “If you do so we will leave the country, and return accompanied by a legion of glittering helmets.”² Public indignation was at its height. “The monks and priests of Rome,” was the cry, “are eating us away like a cancer. God must deliver us or the people will perish....Woe be to them! the cup of wrath will run over. Men of holy church shall be despised as carrion, as dogs shall they be cast out in open places.”³

The arrogance of Rome made the cup run over. Pope Urban V., heedless of the laurels won by the conqueror at Crecy and Poitiers, summoned Edward III. to recognise him as legitimate sovereign of England, and to pay as feudal tribute the annual rent of one thousand marcs. In case of refusal the king was to appear before him at Rome. For thirty-three years the popes had never mentioned the tribute accorded by John to Innocent III., and which had always been paid very irregularly. The conqueror of the Valois was irritated by this insolence on the part of an Italian bishop, and called on God to avenge England. From Oxford came forth the avenger.

John Wickliffe, born in 1324, in a little village in Yorkshire, was one of the students who attended the lectures of the pious Bradwardine at Merton College. He was in the flower of his age, and produced a great sensation in the university. In 1348, a terrible pestilence, which is said to have carried off half the human race, appeared in England after successively devastating Asia and the continent of Europe. This visitation of the Almighty sounded like the trumpet of the judgment day in the heart of Wickliffe. Alarmed at the thoughts of eternity, the young man—for he was then only twenty-four years old—passed days and nights in his cell groaning and sighing, and calling upon God to show him the path he ought to follow.⁴ He found it in the Holy Scriptures, and resolved to make it known to others. He commenced with prudence; but being elected in 1361 warden of Balliol, and in 1365 warden of Canterbury College also, he began to set

¹ Ibid, 240.

² Come again with bright heads. Ibid.

³ Wickliffe, *The Last Age of the Church*.

⁴ Long debating and deliberating with himself, with many secret sighs. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, i. p. 485 fol. Lond. 1684.

forth the doctrine of faith in a more energetic manner. His biblical and philosophical studies, his knowledge of theology, his penetrating mind, the purity of his manners, and his unbending courage, rendered him the object of general admiration. A profound teacher, like his master, and an eloquent preacher, he demonstrated to the learned during the course of the week what he intended to preach, and on Sunday he preached to the people what he had previously demonstrated. His disputations gave strength to his sermons, and his sermons shed light upon his disputations. He accused the clergy of having banished the Holy Scriptures, and required that the authority of the word of God should be re-established in the church. Loud acclamations crowned these discussions, and the crowd of vulgar minds trembled with indignation when they heard these shouts of applause.

Wickliffe was forty years old when the papal arrogance stirred England to its depths. Being at once an able politician and a fervent Christian, he vigorously defended the rights of the crown against the Romish aggression, and by his arguments not only enlightened his fellow-countrymen generally, but stirred up the zeal of several members of both houses of parliament.

The parliament assembled, and never perhaps had it been summoned on a question which excited to so high a degree the emotions of England, and indeed of Christendom. The debates in the House of Lords were especially remarkable: all the arguments of Wickliffe were reproduced. "Feudal tribute is due," said one, "only to him who can grant feudal protection, in return. Now how can the pope wage war to protect his fiefs?"—"Is it as vassal of the crown or as feudal superior," asked another, "that the pope demands part of our property? Urban V. will not accept the first of these titles.... Well and good! but the English people will not acknowledge the second."—"Why," said a third, "was this tribute originally granted? To pay the pope for absolving John.... His demand, then, is mere simony, a kind of clerical swindling, which the lords spiritual and temporal should indignantlly oppose."—"No," said another speaker, "England belongs not to the pope. The pope is but a man, subject to sin; but Christ is the Lord of lords, and this kingdom is held directly and solely of Christ alone."¹ Thus spoke the lords inspired by Wickliffe. Parliament de-

¹ These opinions are reported by Wickliffe, in a treatise preserved in the Selden MSS. and printed by Mr J. Lewis, in his *History of Wickliffe*, App. No 30, p. 349.

cided unanimously that no prince had the right to alienate the sovereignty of the kingdom without the consent of the other two estates, and that if the pontiff should attempt to proceed against the king of England as his vassal, the nation should rise in a body to maintain the independence of the crown.

To no purpose did this generous resolution excite the wrath of the partisans of Rome; to no purpose did they assert that, by the canon law, the king ought to be deprived of his fief, and that England now belonged to the pope: “No,” replied Wickliffe, “the canon law has no force when it is opposed to the word of God.” Edward III. made Wickliffe one of his chaplains, and the papacy has ceased from that hour to lay claim—in explicit terms at least—to the sovereignty of England. When the pope gave up his temporal he was desirous, at the very least, of keeping up his ecclesiastical pretensions, and to procure the repeal of the statutes of Praemunire and Provisors. It was accordingly resolved to hold a conference at Bruges to treat of this question, and Wickliffe, who had been created doctor of theology two years before, proceeded thither with the other commissioners in April 1374. They came to an arrangement in 1375 that the king should bind himself to repeal the penalties denounced against the pontifical agents, and that the pope should confirm the king’s ecclesiastical presentations.¹ But the nation was not pleased with this compromise. “The clerks sent from Rome,” said the Commons, “are more dangerous for the kingdom than Jews or Saracens; every papal agent resident in England, and every Englishman living at the court of Rome, should be punished with death.” Such was the language of the Good Parliament. In the fourteenth century the English nation called a parliament good which did not yield to the papacy.

Wickliffe, after his return to England, was presented to the rectory of Lutterworth, and from that time a practical activity was added to his academic influence. At Oxford he spoke as a master to the young theologians; in his parish he addressed the people as a preacher and as a pastor. “The Gospel,” said he, “is the only source of religion. The Roman pontiff is a mere cut-purse,² and, far from having the right to

He was present during the debate; quam audivi in quodam concilio a dominis secularibus.

¹ Rymer, vii. p. 33, 83-88.

² The proud worldly priest of Rome, and the most cursed of clippers and purse-kervers. Lewis, History of Wickliffe, p. 37. Oxford, 1820.

reprimand the whole world, he may be lawfully reproved by his inferiors, and even by laymen.”

The papacy grew alarmed. Courtenay, son of the Earl of Devonshire, an imperious but grave priest, and full of zeal for what he believed to be the truth, had recently been appointed to the see of London. In parliament he had resisted Wickliffe’s patron, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, third son of Edward III., and head of the house of that name. The bishop, observing that the doctrines of the reformer were spreading among the people, both high and low, charged him with heresy, and summoned him to appear before the convocation assembled in St Paul’s Cathedral.

On the 19th February 1377, an immense crowd, heated with fanaticism, thronged the approaches to the church and filled its aisles, while the citizens favourable to the Reform remained concealed in their houses. Wickliffe moved forward, preceded by Lord Percy, marshal of England, and supported by the Duke of Lancaster, who defended him from purely political motives. He was followed by four bachelors of divinity, his counsel, and passed through the hostile multitude, who looked upon Lancaster as the enemy of their liberties, and upon himself as the enemy of the church.

“Let not the sight of these bishops make you shrink a hair’s breadth in your profession of faith,” said the prince to the doctor. “They are unlearned; and as for this concourse of people, fear nothing, we are here to defend you.”¹ When the reformer had crossed the threshold of the cathedral, the crowd within appeared like a solid wall; and, notwithstanding the efforts of the earl-marshal, Wickliffe and Lancaster could not advance. The people swayed to and fro, hands were raised in violence, and loud hootings re-echoed through the building. At length Percy made an opening in the dense multitude, and Wickliffe passed on.

The haughty Courtenay, who had been commissioned by the archbishop to preside over the assembly, watched these strange movements with anxiety, and beheld with displeasure the learned doctor accompanied by the two most powerful men in England. He said nothing to the Duke of Lancaster, who at that time administered the kingdom, but turning towards Percy observed sharply: “If I had known, my lord, that you claimed to be master in this church, I would

¹ Foxe, Acts, i. p. 487, fol. Lend. 1684.

have taken measures to prevent your entrance.” Lancaster coldly rejoined: “He shall keep such mastery here, though you say nay.” Percy now turned to Wickliffe, who had remained standing, and said: “Sit down and rest yourself.” At this Courtenay gave way to his anger, and exclaimed in a loud tone: “He must not sit down; criminals stand before their judges.” Lancaster, indignant that a learned doctor of England should be refused a favour to which his age alone entitled him (for he was between fifty and sixty) made answer to the bishop: “My lord, you are very arrogant; take care....or I may bring down your pride, and not yours only, but that of all the prelacy in England.”¹—“Do me all the harm you can,” was Courtenay’s haughty reply. The prince rejoined with some emotion: “You are insolent, my lord. You think, no doubt, you can trust on your family....but your relations will have trouble enough to protect themselves.” To this the bishop nobly replied: “My confidence is not in my parents nor in any man; but only in God, in whom I trust, and by whose assistance I will be bold to speak the truth.” Lancaster, who saw hypocrisy only in these words, turned to one of his attendants, and whispered in his ear, but so loud as to be heard by the bystanders: “I would rather pluck the bishop by the hair of his head out of his chair, than take this at his hands.” Every impartial reader must confess that the prelate spoke with greater dignity than the prince. Lancaster had hardly uttered these imprudent words before the bishop’s partisans fell upon him and Percy, and even upon Wickliffe, who alone had remained calm.² The two noblemen resisted, their friends and servants defended them, the uproar became extreme, and there was no hope of restoring tranquillity. The two lords escaped with difficulty, and the assembly broke up in great confusion.

On the following day the earl-marshal having called upon parliament to apprehend the disturbers of the public peace, the clerical party, uniting with the enemies of Lancaster, filled the streets with their clamour; and while the duke and the earl escaped by the Thames, the mob collected before Percy’s house broke down the doors, searched every chamber, and thrust their swords into every dark corner. When they found that he had escaped, the rioters, imagining that he was concealed in Lancaster’s palace, rushed to the Savoy, at that time the

¹ Fuller, Church Hist. cent. xiv. p. 135.

² Fell furiously on the lords. Ibid. 136.

most magnificent building in the kingdom. They killed a priest who endeavoured to stay them, tore down the ducal arms, and hung them on the gallows like those of a traitor. They would have gone still farther if the bishop had not very opportunely reminded them that they were in Lent. As for Wickliffe, he was dismissed with an injunction against preaching his doctrines.

But this decision of the priests was not ratified by the people of England. Public opinion declared in favour of Wickliffe. "If he is guilty," said they, "why is he not punished? If he is innocent, why is he ordered to be silent? If he is the weakest in power, he is the strongest in truth!" And so indeed he was, and never had he spoken with such energy. He openly attacked the pretended apostolical chair, and declared that the two antipopes who sat at Rome and Avignon together made one antichrist. Being now in opposition to the pope, Wickliffe was soon to confess that Christ alone was king of the church; and that it is not possible for a man to be excommunicated, unless first and principally he be excommunicated by himself.¹

Rome could not close her ears. Wickliffe's enemies sent thither nineteen propositions which they ascribed to him, and in the month of June 1377, just as Richard II., son of the Black Prince, a child eleven years old, was ascending the throne, three letters from Gregory XI., addressed to the king, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the university of Oxford, denounced Wickliffe as a heretic, and called upon them to proceed against him as against a common thief. The archbishop issued the citation: the crown and the university were silent.

On the appointed day, Wickliffe, unaccompanied by either Lancaster or Percy, proceeded to the archiepiscopal chapel at Lambeth. "Men expected he should be devoured," says an historian—"being brought into the lion's den."² But the burgesses had taken the prince's place. The assault of Rome had aroused the friends of liberty and truth in England. "The pope's briefs," said they, "ought to have no effect in the realm without the king's consent. Every man is master in his own house."

The archbishop had scarcely opened the sitting, when Sir Louis Clifford entered the chapel, and forbade the court, on the part of the queen-mother, to proceed against the reformer. The bishops were

¹ Vaughan's Wickliffe, Appendix, vol. i. p. 434.

² Fuller's Church Hist. cent. xiv. p. 137.

struck with a panic-fear; “they bent their heads,” says a Roman-catholic historian, “like a reed before the wind.”¹ Wickliffe retired after handing in a protest. “In the first place,” said he, “I resolve with my whole heart, and by the grace of God, to be a sincere Christian; and, while my life shall last, to profess and defend the law of Christ so far as I have power.”² Wickliffe’s enemies attacked this protest, and one of them eagerly maintained that whatever the pope ordered should be looked upon as right. “What!” answered the reformer; “the pope may then exclude from the canon of the Scriptures any book that displeases him, and alter the Bible at pleasure?” Wickliffe thought that Rome, unsettling the grounds of infallibility, had transferred it from the Scriptures to the pope, and was desirous of restoring it to its true place, and re-establishing authority in the church on a truly divine foundation.

A great change was now taking place in the reformer. Busying himself less about the kingdom of England, he occupied himself more about the kingdom of Christ. In him the political phasis was followed by the religious. To carry the glad tidings of the gospel into the remotest hamlets, was now the great idea which possessed Wickliffe. If begging friars (said he) stroll over the country, preaching the legends of saints and the history of the Trojan war, we must do for God’s glory what they do to fill their wallets, and form a vast itinerant evangelization to convert souls to Jesus Christ. Turning to the most pious of his disciples, he said to them: “Go and preach, it is the sublimest work; but imitate not the priests whom we see after the sermon sitting in the alehouses, or at the gaming-table, or wasting their time in hunting. After your sermon is ended, do you visit the sick, the aged, the poor, the blind, and the lame, and succour them according to your ability.” Such was the new practical theology which Wickliffe inaugurated—it was that of Christ himself.

The “poor priests,” as they were called, set off barefoot, a staff in their hands, clothed in a coarse robe, living on alms, and satisfied with the plainest food. They stopped in the fields near some village, in the churchyards, in the marketplaces of the towns, and sometimes in the churches even.³ The people, among whom they were favour-

¹ Walsingham, *Hist. Angliae Major*, p. 203.

² *Propono et volo esse ex integro Christianus, et quamdiu manserit in me halitus, profitens verbo et opere legem Christi.* Vaughan’s *Wickliffe*, i. p. 426.

³ A private statute made by the clergy. *Foxe, Acts*, i. p. 503.

ites, thronged around them, as the men of Northumbria had done at Aidan's preaching. They spoke with a popular eloquence that entirely won over those who listened to them. Of these missionaries none was more beloved than John Ashton. He might be seen wandering over the country in every direction, or seated at some cottage hearth, or alone in some retired crossway, preaching to an attentive crowd. Missions of this kind have constantly revived in England at the great epochs of the church.

The "poor priests" were not content with mere polemics: they preached the great mystery of godliness. "An angel could have made no propitiation for man," one day exclaimed their master Wickliffe; "for the nature which has sinned is not that of the angels. The mediator must needs be a man; but every man being indebted to God for everything that he is able to do, this man must needs have infinite merit, and be at the same time God."¹

The clergy became alarmed, and a law was passed commanding every king's officer to commit the preachers and their followers to prison.² In consequence of this, as soon as the humble missionary began to preach, the monks set themselves in motion. They watched him from the windows of their cells, at the street corners, or from behind a hedge, and then hastened off to procure assistance. But when the constables approached, a body of stout bold men stood forth, with arms in their hands, who surrounded the preacher, and zealously protected him against the attacks of the clergy. Carnal weapons were thus mingled with the preachings of the word of peace. The poor priests returned to their master: Wickliffe comforted them, advised with them, and then they departed once more. Every day this evangelization reached some new spot, and the light was thus penetrating into every quarter of England, when the reformer was suddenly stopped in his work.

Wickliffe was at Oxford in the year 1379, busied in the discharge of his duties as professor of divinity, when he fell dangerously ill. His was not a strong constitution; and work, age, and, above all, persecution had weakened him. Great was the joy in the monasteries; but for that joy to be complete, the heretic must recant. Every effort was made to bring this about in his last moments.

¹ Exposition of the Decalogue.

² Foxe, Acts, i. p. 503.

The four regents, who represented the four religious orders, accompanied by four aldermen, hastened to the bedside of the dying man, hoping to frighten him by threatening him with the vengeance of Heaven. They found him calm and serene. "You have death on your lips," said they; "be touched by your faults, and retract in our presence all that you have said to our injury." Wickliffe remained silent, and the monks flattered themselves with an easy victory. But the nearer the reformer approached eternity, the greater was his horror of monkery. The consolation he had found in Jesus Christ had given him fresh energy. He begged his servant to raise him on his couch. Then, feeble and pale, and scarcely able to support himself, he turned towards the friars, who were waiting for his recantation, and opening his livid lips, and fixing on them a piercing look, he said with emphasis: "I shall not die, but live; and again declare the evil deeds of the friars." We might almost picture to ourselves the spirit of Elijah threatening the priests of Baal. The regents and their companions looked at each other with astonishment. They left the room in confusion, and the reformer recovered to put the finishing touch to the most important of his works against the monks and against the pope.¹

¹ Petrie's Church History, i. p. 504.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Bible—Wickliffe's Translation—Effects of its Publication—Opposition of the Clergy—Wickliffe's Fourth Phasis—Transubstantiation—Excommunication—Wickliffe's Firmness—Wat Tyler—The Synod—The Condemned Propositions—Wickliffe's Petition—Wickliffe before the Primate at Oxford—Wickliffe summoned to Rome—His Answer—The Trialogue—His Death—And Character—His Teaching—His Ecclesiastical Views—A Prophecy.

WICKLIFFE'S ministry had followed a progressive course. At first he had attacked the papacy; next he preached the gospel to the poor; he could take one more step and put the people in permanent possession of the word of God. This was the third phase of his activity.

Scholasticism had banished the Scriptures into a mysterious obscurity. It is true that Bede had translated the Gospel of St John; that the learned men at Alfred's court had translated the four evangelists; that Elfric in the reign of Ethelred had translated some books of the Old Testament; that an Anglo-Norman priest had paraphrased the Gospels and the Acts; that Richard Rolle, "the hermit of Hampole," and some pious clerks in the fourteenth century, had produced a version of the Psalms, the Gospels, and Epistles:—but these rare volumes were hidden, like theological curiosities, in the libraries of a few convents. It was then a maxim that the reading of the Bible was injurious to the laity; and accordingly the priests forbade it, just as the Brahmins forbid the Shasters to the Hindoos. Oral tradition alone preserved among the people the histories of the Holy Scriptures, mingled with legends of the saints. The time appeared ripe for the publication of a Bible. The increase of population, the attention the English were beginning to devote to their own language, the development which the system of representative government had received, the awakening of the human mind—all these circumstances favoured the reformer's design.

Wickliffe was ignorant indeed of Greek and Hebrew; but was it nothing to shake off the dust which for ages had covered the Latin Bible, and to translate it into English? He was a good Latin scholar, of sound understanding, and great penetration; but above all he loved the Bible, he understood It, and desired to communicate this treasure to others. Let us imagine him in his quiet study: on his table is the Vulgate text, corrected after the best manuscripts; And lying open

around him are the commentaries of the doctors of the church, especially those of St Jerome and Nicholas Lyrensis. Between ten and fifteen years he steadily prosecuted his task; learned men aided him with their advice, and one of them, Nicholas Hereford, appears to have translated a few chapters for him. At last in 1380 it was completed. This was a great event in the religious history of England, who, outstripping the nations on the continent, took her station in the foremost rank in the great work of disseminating the Scriptures.

As soon as the translation was finished, the labour of the copyists began, and the Bible was ere long widely circulated either wholly or in portions. The reception of the work surpassed Wickliffe's expectations. The Holy Scriptures exercised a reviving influence over men's hearts. Minds were enlightened; souls were converted; the voices of the "poor priests" had done little in comparison with this voice; something new had entered into the world. Citizens, soldiers, and the lower classes welcomed this new era with acclamations; the high-born curiously examined the unknown book; and even Anne of Luxemburg, wife of Richard II., having learnt English, began to read the Gospels diligently. She did more than this: she made them known to Arundel, archbishop of York and chancellor, and afterwards a persecutor, but who now, struck at the sight of a foreign lady—of a queen, humbly devoting her leisure to the study of (such virtuous books),¹ commenced reading them himself, and rebuked the prelates who neglected this holy pursuit. "You could not meet two persons on the highway," says a contemporary writer, "but one of them was Wickliffe's disciple."

Yet all in England did not equally rejoice: the lower clergy opposed this enthusiasm with complaints and maledictions. "Master John Wickliffe, by translating the gospel into English," said the monks, "has rendered it more acceptable and more intelligible to laymen and even to women, than it had hitherto been to learned and intelligent clerks! The gospel pearl is everywhere cast out and trodden under foot of swine."² New contests arose for the reformer. Wherever he bent his steps he was violently attacked. "It is heresy,"

¹ Foxe, Acts, i. p. 578.

² Evangelica margarita spargitur et a porcis conculcatur. Knyghton, De eventibus Angliae, p. 264.

cried the monks, “to speak of Holy Scripture in English.”¹ “Since the church has approved of the four Gospels, she would have been just as able to reject them and admit others! The church sanctions and condemns what she pleasesLearn to believe in the church rather than in the gospel.” These clamours did not alarm Wickliffe. “Many nations have had the Bible in their own language. The Bible is the faith of the church. Though the pope and all his clerks should disappear from the face of the earth,” said he, “our faith would not fail, for it is founded on Jesus alone, our Master and our God.” But Wickliffe did not stand alone: in the palace as in the cottage, and even in parliament, the rights of Holy Scripture found defenders. A motion having been made in the Upper House (1390) to seize all the copies of the Bible, the Duke of Lancaster exclaimed: “Are we then the very dregs of humanity, that we cannot possess the laws of our religion in our own tongue?”²

Having given his fellow-countrymen the Bible, Wickliffe began to reflect on its contents. This was a new step in his onward path. There comes a moment when the Christian, saved by a lively faith, feels the need of giving an account to himself of this faith, and this originates the science of theology. This is a natural movement: if the child, who at first possesses sensations and affections only, feels the want, as he grows up, of reflection and knowledge, why should it not be the same with the Christian? Politics—home missions—Holy Scripture had engaged Wickliffe in succession; theology had its turn, and this was the fourth phase of his life. Yet he did not penetrate to the same degree as the men of the sixteenth century into the depths of the Christian doctrine; and he attached himself in a more especial manner to those ecclesiastical dogmas which were more closely connected with the presumptuous hierarchy—and the simoniacal gains of Rome,—such as transubstantiation. The Anglo Saxon church had not professed this doctrine. “The host is the body of Christ, not bodily but spiritually,” said Elfric in the tenth century, in a letter addressed to the Archbishop of York; but Lanfranc, the opponent of Berengarius, had taught England that at the word of a priest God quitted heaven and descended on the altar. Wickliffe undertook to overthrow the pedestal on which the pride of the priesthood was founded. “The eu-

¹ It is heresy to speak of the Holy Scripture in English. Wickliffe’s *Wicket*, p. 4. Oxford, 1612, quarto.

² Weber, *Akatholische Kirchen*, i. p. 81.

charist is naturally bread and wine,” he taught at Oxford in 1381; “but by virtue of the sacramental words it contains in every part the real body and blood of Christ.” He did not stop here. “The consecrated wafer which we see on the altar,” said he, “is not Christ, nor any part of him, but his efficient sign.”¹ He oscillated between those two shades of doctrine; but to the first he more habitually attached himself. He denied the sacrifice of the mass offered by the priest, because it was substituted for the sacrifice of the cross offered up by Jesus Christ; and rejected transubstantiation, because it nullified the spiritual and living presence of the Lord.

When Wickliffe’s enemies heard these propositions, they appeared horror-stricken, and yet in secret they were delighted at the prospect of destroying him. They met together, examined twelve theses he had published, and pronounced against him suspension from all teaching, imprisonment, and the greater excommunication. At the same time his friends became alarmed, their zeal cooled, and many of them forsook him. The Duke of Lancaster, in particular, could not follow him into this new sphere. That prince had no objection to an ecclesiastical opposition which might aid the political power, and for that purpose he had tried to enlist the reformer’s talents and courage; but he feared a dogmatic opposition that might compromise him. The sky was heavy with clouds; Wickliffe was alone.

The storm soon burst upon him. One day, while seated in his doctoral chair in the Augustine school, and calmly explaining the nature of the eucharist, an officer entered the hall, and read the sentence of condemnation. It was the design of his enemies to humble the professor in the eyes of his disciples. Lancaster immediately became alarmed, and hastening to his old friend begged him—ordered him even—to trouble himself no more about this matter. Attacked on every side, Wickliffe for a time remained silent. Shall he sacrifice the truth to save his reputation—his repose—perhaps his life? Shall expediency get the better of faith—Lancaster prevail over Wickliffe? No: his courage was invincible. “Since the year of our Lord 1000,” said he, “all the doctors have been in error about the sacrament of the altar—except, perhaps, it may be Berengarius. How canst thou, O priest, who art but a man, make thy Maker? What! the thing that groweth in the fields—that ear which thou pluckest to-day, shall be God

¹ Efficax ejus signum. Conclusio Ima Vaughan, ii. p. 436, App.

to-morrow!....As you cannot make the works which He made, how shall ye make Him who made the works?"¹ Woe to the adulterous generation that believeth the testimony of Innocent rather than of the Gospel."² Wickliffe called upon his adversaries to refute the opinions they had condemned, and finding that they threatened him with a civil penalty (imprisonment), he appealed to the king.

The time was not favourable for such an appeal. A fatal circumstance increased Wickliffe's danger. Wat Tyler and a dissolute priest named Ball, taking advantage of the ill-will excited by the rapacity and brutality of the royal tax gatherers, had occupied London with 100,000 men. John Ball kept up the spirits of the insurgents, not by expositions of the gospel, like Wickliffe's poor priests, but by fiery comments on the distich they had chosen for their device:

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

There were many who felt no scruple in ascribing these disorders to the reformer, who was quite innocent of them; and Courtenay, bishop of London, having been translated to the see of Canterbury, lost no time in convoking a synod to pronounce on this matter of Wickliffe's. They met in the middle of May, about two o'clock in the afternoon, and were proceeding to pronounce sentence when an earthquake, which shook the city of London and all Britain, so alarmed the members of the council that they unanimously demanded the adjournment of a decision which appeared so manifestly rebuked by God. But the archbishop skilfully turned this strange phenomenon to his own purposes: "Know you not," said he, "that the noxious vapours which catch fire in the bosom of the earth, and give rise to these phenomena which alarm you, lose all their force when they burst forth? Well, in like manner, by rejecting the wicked from our community, we shall put an end to the convulsions of the church." The bishops regained their courage; and one of the primate's officers read ten propositions, said to be Wickliffe's, but ascribing to him certain errors of which he was quite innocent. The following most excited the

¹ Wycleff's Wyckett, Tracts, pp. 276, 279.

² *Vae generationi adulterae quae plus credit testimonio Innocentii quam sensui Evangelii.* Confessio, Vaughan, 1453, App.

anger of the priests: “God must obey the devil.¹ After Urban VI. we must receive no one as pope, but live according to the manner of the Greeks.” The ten propositions were condemned as heretical, and the archbishop enjoined all persons to shun, as they would a venomous serpent, all who should preach the aforesaid errors. “If we permit this heretic to appeal continually to the passions of the people,” said the primate to the king, “our destruction is inevitable. We must silence these lollards—these psalm-singers.”² The king gave authority “to confine in the prisons of the state any who should maintain the condemned propositions.”

Day by day the circle contracted around Wickliffe. The prudent Repingdon, the learned Hereford, and even the eloquent Ashton, the firmest of the three, departed from him. The veteran champion of the truth which had once gathered a whole nation round it, had reached the days when “strong men shall bow themselves,” and now, when harassed by persecution, he found himself alone. But boldly he uplifted his hoary head and exclaimed: “The doctrine of the gospel shall never perish; and if the earth once quaked, it was because they condemned Jesus Christ.”

He did not stop here. In proportion as his physical strength decreased, his moral strength increased. Instead of parrying the blows aimed at him, he resolved on dealing more terrible ones still. He knew that if the king and the nobility were for the priests, the lower house and the citizens were for liberty and truth. He therefore presented a bold petition to the Commons in the month of November 1382. “Since Jesus Christ shed his blood to free his church, I demand its freedom. I demand that every one may leave those gloomy walls [the convents], within which a tyrannical law prevails, and embrace a simple and peaceful life under the open vault of heaven. I demand that the poor inhabitants of our towns and villages be not constrained to furnish a worldly priest, often a vicious man and a heretic, with the means of satisfying his ostentation, his gluttony, and his licentiousness—of buying a showy horse, costly saddles, bridles with tinkling bells, rich garments, and soft furs, while they see their wives, chil-

¹ Quod Deus debet obedire diabolo. Mansi, xxvi. p. 695. Wickliffe denied having written or spoken the sentiment here ascribed to him.

² From lollen to sing; as beggars (beggars) from beggen.

dren, and neighbours, dying of hunger.¹ The House of Commons, recollecting that they had not given their consent to the persecuting statute drawn up by the clergy and approved by the king and the lords, demanded its repeal. Was the Reformation about to begin by the will of the people?

Courtenay, indignant at this intervention of the Commons, and ever stimulated by a zeal for his church, which would have been better directed towards the word of God, visited Oxford in November 1382, and having gathered round him a number of bishops, doctors, priests, students, and laymen, summoned Wickliffe before him. Forty years ago the reformer had come up to the university: Oxford had become his home and now it was turning against him! Weakened by labours, by trials, by that ardent soul which preyed upon his feeble body, he might have refused to appear. But Wickliffe, who never feared the face of man, came before them with a good conscience. We may conjecture that there were among the crowd some disciples who felt their hearts burn at the sight of their master; but no outward sign indicated their emotion. The solemn silence of a court of justice had succeeded the shouts of enthusiastic youths. Yet Wickliffe did not despair: he raised his venerable head, and turned to Courtenay with that confident look which had made the regents of Oxford shrink away. Growing wroth against the priests of Baal, he reproached them with disseminating error in order to sell their masses. Then he stopped, and uttered these simple and energetic words "The truth shall prevail!"² Having thus spoken he prepared to leave the court: his enemies dared not say a word; and, like his divine master at Nazareth, he passed through the midst of them, and no man ventured to stop him. He then withdrew to his cure at Lutterworth.

He had not yet reached the harbour. He was living peacefully among his books and his parishioners, and the priests seemed inclined to leave him alone, when another blow was aimed at him. A papal brief summoned him to Rome, to appear before that tribunal which had so often shed the blood of its adversaries. His bodily infirmities convinced him that he could not obey this summons. But if Wickliffe refused to hear Urban, Urban could not choose but hear Wickliffe. The church was at that time divided between two chiefs: France,

¹ A complaint of John Wycleff. Tracts and Treatises edited by the Wickliffe Society, p. 268.

² Finaliter veritas vincet eos. Vaughan, Appendix, ii. p. 453.

Scotland, Savoy, Lorraine, Castile, and Aragon acknowledged Clement VII.; while Italy, England, Germany, Sweden, Poland, and Hungary acknowledged Urban VI. Wickliffe shall tell us who is the true head of the church universal. And while the two popes were excommunicating and abusing each other, and selling heaven and earth for their own gain, the reformer was confessing that incorruptible Word, which establishes real unity in the church. “I believe,” said he, “that the gospel of Christ is the whole body of God’s law. I believe that Christ, who gave it to us, is very God and very man, and that this gospel revelation is, accordingly, superior to all other parts of Holy Scripture.¹ I believe that the bishop of Rome is bound more than all other men to submit to it, for the greatness among Christ’s disciples did not consist in worldly dignity or honours, but in the exact following of Christ in his life and manners. No faithful man ought to follow the pope, but in such points as he hath followed Jesus Christ. The pope ought to leave unto the secular power all temporal dominion and rule: and thereunto effectually more and more exhort his whole clergy...If I could labour according to my desire in mine own person, I would surely present myself before the bishop of Rome, but the Lord hath otherwise visited me to the contrary, and hath taught me rather to obey God than men.”²

Urban, who at that moment chanced to be very busied in his contest with Clement, did not think it prudent to begin another with Wickliffe, and so let the matter rest there. From this time the doctor passed the remainder of his days in peace in the company of three personages, two of whom were his particular friends, and the third his constant adversary: these were *Aletheia*, *Phronesis*, and *Pseudes*. *Aletheia* (truth) proposed questions; *Pseudes* (falsehood) urged objections; and *Phronesis* (understanding) laid down the sound doctrine. These three characters carried on a conversation (trialogue) in which great truths were boldly professed. The opposition between the pope and Christ—between the canons of Romanism and the Bible—was painted in striking colours. This is one of the primary truths which the church must never forget. “The church has fallen,” said one of the in-

¹ This is the reading of the Bodleian manuscript—“and be [by] this it passes all other laws.” In Foxe, Wickliffe appears to ascribe to Christ himself this superiority over all Scripture,—a distinction hardly in the mind of the reformer or of his age.

² An Epistle of J. Wickliffe to Pope Urban VI. Foxe, Acts, i. p. 507, fol. Lend. 1684; also Lewis (Wickliffe), p. 333, Append.

terlocutors in the work in question, “because she has abandoned the gospel, and preferred the laws of the pope. Although there should be a hundred popes in the world at once, and all the friars living should be transformed into cardinals, we must withhold our confidence unless so far as they are founded in Holy Scripture.”¹

These words were the last flicker of the torch. Wickliffe looked upon his end as near, and entertained no idea that it would come in peace. A dungeon on one of the seven hills, or a burning pile in London, was all he expected. “Why do you talk of seeking the crown of martyrdom afar?” asked he. “Preach the gospel of Christ to haughty prelates, and martyrdom will not fail you. What! I should live and be silent?...never! Let the blow fall, I await its coming.”²

The stroke was spared him. The war between two Wicked priests, Urban and Clement, left the disciples of our Lord in peace. And besides, was it worth while cutting short a life that was drawing to a close? Wickliffe, therefore, continued tranquilly to preach Jesus Christ; and on the 29th December 1384, as he was in his church at Lutterworth, in the midst of his flock, at the very moment that he stood before the altar, and was elevating the host with trembling hands, he fell upon the pavement struck with paralysis. He was carried to his house by the affectionate friends around him, and after lingering forty-eight hours resigned his soul to God on the last day of the year.

Thus was removed from the church one of the boldest witnesses to the truth. The seriousness of his language, the holiness of his life, and the energy of his faith, had intimidated the popedom. Travellers relate that if a lion is met in the desert, it is sufficient to look steadily at him, and the beast turns away roaring from the eye of man. Wickliffe had fixed the eye of a Christian on the papacy, and the affrighted papacy had left him in peace. Hunted down unceasingly while living, he died in quiet, at the very moment when by faith he was eating the flesh and drinking the blood which gave eternal life. A glorious end to a glorious life.

The Reformation of England had begun.

¹ Ideo si essent centum papa;, et omnes fratres essent versi in cardinales, non deberet concedi sententiae suae in materia fidei, nisi de quanto se fundaverint in Scriptura. Trialogus, lib. iv. cap. vii.

² Vaughan's Life of Wickliffe, ii. p. 210, 257.

Wickliffe is the greatest English reformer: he was in truth the first reformer of Christendom, and to him, under God, Britain is indebted for the honour of being the foremost in the attack upon the theocratic system of Gregory VII. The work of the Waldenses, excellent as it was, cannot be compared to his. If Luther and Calvin are the fathers of the Reformation, Wickliffe is its grandfather.

Wickliffe, like most great men, possessed qualities which are not generally found together. While his understanding was eminently speculative—his treatise on the *Reality of universal Ideas*¹ made a sensation in philosophy—he possessed that practical and active mind which characterizes the Anglo-Saxon race. As a divine, he was at once scriptural and spiritual, soundly orthodox, and possessed of an inward and lively faith. With a boldness that impelled him to rush into the midst of danger, he combined a logical and consistent mind, which constantly led him forward in knowledge, and caused him to maintain with perseverance the truths he had once proclaimed. First of all, as a Christian, he had devoted his strength to the cause of the church; but he was at the same time a citizen, and the realm, his nation, and his king, had also a great share in his unwearied activity. He was a man complete.

If the man is admirable, his teaching is no less so. Scripture, which is the rule of truth, should be (according to his views) the rule of reformation, and we must reject every doctrine and every precept which does not rest on that foundation.² To believe in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome, and from that error has come the ruin of the church. Conversion proceeds from the grace of God alone, and the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism.³ Christ is everything in Christianity; whosoever abandons that fountain which is ever ready to impart life, and turns to muddy and stagnant waters, is a madman.⁴ Faith is a gift of God; it puts aside all merit, and should banish all fear from the mind.⁵ The one thing needful in the Christian life and in the Lord's Supper is not a vain formalism and superstitious

¹ De universalibus realibus.

² Auctoritas Scripturae sacrae, quae est lex Christi, infinitum excedit quam libet scripturam aliam. Dialog. [Trialogus] lib. iii. cap. xxx.; see in particular cap. xxxi.

³ Ibid. de predestinatione, de peccato, de gratia, &c.

⁴ Ibid. lib. iii. cap. xxx.

⁵ Fidem a Dee infusam sine aliqua trepidatione fidei contraria. Ibid. lib. iii. cap. ii.

rites, but communion with Christ according to the power of the spiritual life.¹ Let Christians submit not to the word of a priest but to the word of God. In the primitive church there were but two orders, the deacon and the priest: the presbyter and the bishop were one.² The sublimest calling which man can attain on earth is that of preaching the word of God. The true church is the assembly of the righteous for whom Christ shed his blood. So long as Christ is in heaven, in Him the church possesses the best pope. It is possible for a pope to be condemned at the last day because of his sins. Would men compel us to recognise as our head “a devil of hell?”³ Such were the essential points of Wickliffe’s doctrine. It was the echo of the doctrine of the apostles—the prelude to that of the reformers.

In many respects Wickliffe is the Luther of England; but the times of revival had not yet come, and the English reformer could not gain such striking victories over Rome as the German reformer. While Luther was surrounded by an ever increasing number of scholars and princes, who confessed the same faith as himself, Wickliffe shone almost alone in the firmament of the church. The boldness with which he substituted a living spirituality for a superstitious formalism, caused those to shrink back in affright who had gone with him against friars, priests, and popes. Ere long the Roman pontiff ordered him to be thrown into prison, and the monks threatened his life;⁴ but God protected him, and he remained calm amidst the machinations of his adversaries. “Antichrist,” said he, “can only kill the body.” Having one foot in the grave already, he foretold that, from the very bosom of monkery, would some day proceed the regeneration of the church. “If the friars, whom God condescends to teach, shall be converted to the primitive religion of Christ,” said he, “we shall see them abandoning their unbelief, returning freely, with or without the permission of Antichrist, to the primitive religion of the Lord, and building up the church, as did St Paul.”⁵

¹ *Secundum rationem spiritualis et virtualis existentiae. Ibid. lib. iv. cap. viii.*

² *Fuit idem presbyter atque episcopus. Ibid. lib. iv. cap. xv.*

³ Vaughan’s *Life of Wickliffe*, ii. p. 307. The Christian public is much indebted to Dr Vaughan for his biography of this reformer.

⁴ *Multitude fratrum mortem tuam multipliciter machinantur. Dialog., lib. iv. cap. iv.*

⁵ *Aliqui fratres quos Deus docere dignatur . . . relicta sua perfidia redibunt libere ad religionem Christi primaevam, et tunc aedificabunt ecclesiam, sicut Paulus. Ibid., lib. iv. cap. xxx.*

Thus did Wickliffe's piercing glance discover, at the distance of nearly a century and a half, the young monk Luther in the Augustine convent at Erfurth, converted by the epistle to the Romans, and returning to the spirit of St Paul and the religion of Jesus Christ. Time was hastening on to the fulfilment of this prophecy. "The rising sun of the Reformation," for so has Wickliffe been called, had appeared above the horizon, and its beams were no more to be extinguished. In vain will thick clouds veil it at times; the distant hill-tops of Eastern Europe will soon reflect its rays;¹ and its piercing light, increasing in brightness, will pour over all the world, at the hour of the church's renovation, floods of knowledge and of life.

¹ John Huss in Bohemia.

CHAPTER IX.

The Wickliffites—Call for Reform—Richard II.—The First Martyr—Lord Cobham—Appears before Henry V.—Before the Archbishop—His Confession and Death—The Lollards.

WICKLIFFE'S death manifested the power of his teaching. The master being removed, his disciples set their hands to the plough, and England was almost won over to the reformer's doctrines. The Wickliffites recognised a ministry independent of Rome, and deriving authority from the word of God alone. "Every minister," said they, "can administer the sacraments and confer the cure of souls as well as the pope." To the licentious wealth of the clergy they opposed a Christian poverty, and to the degenerate asceticism of the mendicant orders, a spiritual and free life. The townsfolk crowded around these humble preachers; the soldiers listened to them, armed with sword and buckler to defend them;¹ the nobility took down the images from their baronial chapels;² and even the royal family was partly won over to the Reformation. England was like a tree cut down to the ground, from whose roots fresh buds are shooting out on every side, ere long to cover all the earth beneath their shade.³

This augmented the courage of Wickliffe's disciples, and in many places the people took the initiative in the reform. The walls of St Paul's and other cathedrals were hung with placards aimed at the priests and friars, and the abuses of which they were the defenders; and in 1395 the friends of the Gospel petitioned parliament for a general reform. "The essence of the worship which comes from Rome," said they, consists in signs and ceremonies, and not in the efficacy of the Holy Ghost: and therefore it is not that which Christ has ordained. Temporal things are distinct from spiritual things: a king and a bishop ought not to be one and the same person."⁴ And then, from not clearly understanding the principle of the separation of the functions which they proclaimed, they called upon parliament to "abolish celibacy, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, offerings to images, au-

¹ Assistere solent gladio et pelta stipati ad eorum defensionem.. Knyghton, lib. v. p. 2660.

² Milites cum ducibus et comitibus erant praecipue eis adhaerentes. Ibid.

³ Quasi germinantes multiplicati sunt nimis et impleverunt ubique orbem regni. Ibid. These "Conclusiones" are reprinted by Lewis (Wickliffe), p. 337.

⁴ Rex et episcopus in una persona, 3c. Knyghton, lib. v. p. 2660.

ricular confession, war, the arts unnecessary to life, the practice of blessing oil, salt, wax, incense, stones, mitres, and pilgrims' staffs. All these pertain to necromancy and not to theology." Emboldened by the absence of the king in Ireland, they fixed their Twelve Conclusions on the gates of St Paul's and Westminster Abbey. This became the signal for persecution.

As soon as Arundel, archbishop of York, and Braybrooke, bishop of London, had read these propositions, they hastily crossed St George's Channel, and conjured the king to return to England. The prince hesitated not to comply, for his wife, the pious Anne of Luxemburg, was dead. Richard, during childhood and youth, had been committed in succession to the charge of several guardians, and like children (says an historian), whose nurses have been often changed, he thrived none the better for it. He did good or evil, according to the influence of those around him, and had no decided inclinations except for ostentation and licentiousness. The clergy were not mistaken in calculating on such a prince. On his return to London he forbade the parliament to take the Wickliffite petition into consideration; and having summoned before him the most distinguished of its supporters, such as Story, Clifford, Latimer, and Montacute, he threatened them with death if they continued to defend their abominable opinions. Thus was the work of the reformer about to be destroyed.

But Richard had hardly withdrawn his hand from the gospel, when God (says the annalist) withdrew his hand from him.¹ His cousin, Henry of Hereford, son of the famous duke of Lancaster, and who had been banished from England, suddenly sailed from the continent, landed in Yorkshire, gathered all the malcontents around him, and was acknowledged king. The unhappy Richard, after being formally deposed, was confined in Pontefract castle, where he soon terminated his earthly career.

The son of Wickliffe's old defender was now king: a reform of the church seemed imminent; but the primate Arundel had foreseen the danger. This cunning priest and skilful politician had observed which way the wind blew, and deserted Richard in good time. Taking Lancaster by the hand, he put the crown on his head, saying to him: "To consolidate your throne, conciliate the clergy, and sacrifice the Lollards."—"I will be the protector of the church," replied Henry IV.,

¹ Foxe, Acts, i. p. 584, fol. Lend. 1684.

and from that hour the power of the priests was greater than the power of the nobility. Rome has ever been adroit in profiting by revolutions.

Lancaster, in his eagerness to show his gratitude to the priests, ordered that every incorrigible heretic should be burnt alive, to terrify his companions.¹ Practice followed close upon the theory. A pious priest named William Sawtre had presumed to say: “Instead of adoring the cross on which Christ suffered, I adore Christ who suffered on it.”² He was dragged to St Paul’s; his hair was shaved off; a layman’s cap was placed on his head; and the primate handed him over to the mercy of the earl-marshal of England. This mercy was shown him—he was burnt alive at Smithfield in the beginning of March 1401. Sawtre was the first martyr to protestantism.

Encouraged by this act of faith—this *auto da fé*—the clergy drew up the articles known as the “Constitutions of Arundel,” which forbade the reading of the Bible, and styled the pope, “not a mere man, but a true God.”³ The Lollards’ tower, in the archiepiscopal palace of Lambeth, was soon filled with pretended heretics, many of whom carved on the walls of their dungeons the expression of their sorrow and their hopes: Jesus *amor meus*, wrote one of them.⁴

To crush the lowly was not enough: the Gospel must be driven from the more exalted stations. The priests, who were sincere in their belief, regarded those noblemen as misleaders who set the word of God above the laws of Rome, and accordingly they girded themselves for the work. A few miles from Rochester stood Cowling Castle, in the midst of the fertile pastures watered by the Medway,

The fair Medway that with wanton pride
Forms silver mazes with her crooked tide.⁵

In the beginning of the fifteenth century it was inhabited by Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, a man in high favour with the king. The “poor priests” thronged to Cowling in quest of Wickliffe’s writings, of which Cobham had caused numerous copies to be made, and

¹ Ibid. p. 586. This is the statute known as 2 Henry IV. c. 15, the first actual law in England against heresy.

² Ibid. p. 589.

³ Not of pure man but of true God, here in earth. Ibid. p. 596.

⁴ “Jesus is my love.” These words are still to be read in the tower.

⁵ Blackmore.

whence they were circulated through the dioceses of Canterbury, Rochester, London, and Hertford. Cobham attended their preaching, and if any enemies ventured to interrupt them, he threatened them with his swords.¹ “I would sooner risk my life,” said he, “than submit to such unjust decrees as dishonour the everlasting Testament.” The king would not permit the clergy to lay hands on his favourite.

But Henry V. having succeeded his father in 1413, and passed from the houses of ill-fame he had hitherto frequented, to the foot of the altars and the head of the armies, the archbishop immediately denounced Cobham to him, and he was summoned to appear before the king. Sir John had understood Wickliffe’s doctrine, and experienced in his own person the might of the divine Word. “As touching the pope and his spirituality,” he said to the king, “I owe them neither suit nor service, forasmuch as I know him by the Scriptures to be the great antichrist.”² Henry thrust aside Cobham’s hand as he presented his confession of faith: “I will not receive this paper, lay it before your judges.” When he saw his profession refused, Cobham had recourse to the only arm which he knew of out of the gospel. The differences which we now settle by pamphlets were then very commonly settled by the sword:—“I offer in defence of my faith to fight for life or death with any man living, Christian or pagan, always excepting your majesty.”³ Cobham was led to the Tower.

On the 23d September 1413, he was taken before the ecclesiastical tribunal then sitting at St Paul’s. “We must believe,” said the primate to him, “what the holy church of Rome teaches, without demanding Christ’s authority.” “Believe!” shouted the priests, “believe!”—“I am willing to believe all that God desires,” said Sir John; “but that the pope should have authority to teach what is contrary to Scripture—that I can never believe.” He was led back to the Tower. The word of God was to have its martyr. On Monday, 25th September, a crowd of priests, canons, friars, clerks, and indulgence-sellers, thronged the large hall of the Dominican convent, and attacked Lord Cobham with abusive language. These insults, the importance of the moment for the Reformation of England, the catastrophe that must needs close the

¹ Eorum praedicationibus nefariis interfuit, et contradictores, si quos repererat minis et terroribus et gladii secularis potentia compescuit. Rymer, Foedera, tom. iv. pars 2, p. 50.

² Foxe, Acts, vol. i. p. 636, fol.

³ Ibid. p. 637.

scene: all agitated his soul to its very depths. When the archbishop called upon him to confess his offence, he fell on his knees, and lifting up his hands to heaven, exclaimed: "I confess to Thee, O God! and acknowledge that in my frail youth I seriously offended Thee by my pride, anger, intemperance, and impurity: for these offences I implore thy mercy!" Then standing up, his face still wet with tears, he said: "I ask not your absolution: it is God's only that I need."¹ The clergy did not despair, however, of reducing this high-spirited gentleman: they knew that spiritual strength is not always conjoined with bodily vigour, and they hoped to vanquish by priestly sophisms the man who dared challenge the papal champions to single combat. "Sir John," said the primate at last, "you have said some very strange things: we have spent much time in endeavours to convince you, but all to no effect. The day passeth away: you must either submit yourself to the ordinance of the most holy church..."—"I will none otherwise believe than what I have told you. Do with me what you will."—"Well then, we must needs do the law," the archbishop made answer.

Arundel stood up; all the priests and people rose with him and uncovered their heads. Then holding the sentence of death in his hand, he read it with a loud clear voice. "It is well," said Sir John; "though you condemn my body, you can do no harm to my soul, by the grace of my eternal God." He was again led back to the Tower, whence he escaped one night, and took refuge in Wales. He was retaken in December 1417, carried to London, dragged on a hurdle to Saint Giles's fields, and there suspended by chains over a slow fire, and cruelly burned to death. Thus died a Christian, illustrious after the fashion of his age—a champion of the word of God. The London prisons were filled with Wickliffites, and it was decreed that they should be hung on the king's account, and burnt for God's.²

The intimidated Lollards were compelled to hide themselves in the humblest ranks of the people, and to hold their meetings in secret. The work of redemption was proceeding noiselessly among the elect of God. Of these Lollards, there were many who had been redeemed by Jesus Christ; but in general they knew not, to the same extent as

¹ Quod nullam absolutionem in hac parte peteret a nobis, sed a solo Deo. Rymer, Foedera, p. 51.

² Incendio propter Deum, suspendio propter regem. Thom. waldensis '•.a proemio. Raynald, ann. 1414. No 16.

the evangelical Christians of the sixteenth century, the quickening and justifying power of faith. They were plain, meek, and often timid folks, attracted by the word of God, affected at the condemnation it pronounces against the errors of Rome, and desirous of living according to its commandments. God had assigned them a part—and an important part too—in the great transformation of Christianity. Their humble piety, their passive resistance, the shameful treatment which they bore with resignation, the penitent's robes with which they were covered, the tapers they were compelled to hold at the church-door—all these things betrayed the pride of the priests, and filled the most generous minds with doubts and vague desires. By a baptism of suffering, God was then preparing the way to a glorious reformation.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 When they have overmuch riches, both in great waste houses and precious clothes, in great feasts and many jewels and treasures. Wickliffe's Tracts and Treatises, edited by the Wickliffe Society, p. 224.
- 2 Ibid, 240.
- 3 Come again with bright heads. Ibid.
- 4 Wickliffe, The Last Age of the Church.
- 5 Long debating and deliberating with himself, with many secret sighs. Foxe, Acts and Monuments, i. p. 485 fol. Lond. 1684
- 6 These opinions are reported by Wickliffe, in a treatise preserved in the Selden MSS. and printed by Mr J. Lewis, in his History of Wickliffe, App. No 30, p. 349. He was present during the debate; *quam audivi in quodam concilio a dominis secularibus*.
- 7 Rymer, vii. p. 33, 83-88.
- 8 The proud worldly priest of Rome, and the most cursed of clippers and purse-kervers. Lewis, History of Wickliffe, p. 37. Oxford, 1820.
- 9 Foxe, Acts, i. p. 487, fol. Lend. 1684.
- 10 Fuller, Church Hist. cent. xiv. p. 135.
- 11 Fell furiously on the lords. Ibid. 136.
- 12 Vaughan's Wickliffe, Appendix, vol. i. p. 434.
- 13 Fuller's Church Hist. cent. xiv. p. 137.
- 14 Walsingham, Hist. Angliae Major, p. 203.
- 15 Propono et volo esse ex integro Christianus, et quamdiu manserit in me halitus, profitens verbo et opere legem Christi. Vaughan's Wickliffe, i. p. 426.
- 16 A private statute made by the clergy. Foxe, Acts, i. p. 503.
- 17 Exposition of the Decalogue.
- 18 Foxe, Acts, i. p. 503.
- 19 Petrie's Church History, i. p. 504.
- 20 Foxe, Acts, i. p. 578.
- 21 Evangelica margarita spargitur et a porcis conculcatur. Knyghton, De eventibus Angliae, p. 264.
- 22 It is heresy to speak of the Holy Scripture in English. Wickliffe's Wicket, p. 4. Oxford, 1612, quarto.
- 23 Weber, Akatholische Kirchen, i. p. 81.

- 24 Efficax ejus signum. Conclusio Ima Vaughan, ii. p. 436, App.
- 25 Wycleff's Wyckett, Tracts, pp. 276, 279.
- 26 Vae generationi adulterae quae plus credit testimonio Innocentii quam sensui Evangelii. Confessio, Vaughan, 1453, App.
- 27 Quod Deus debet obedire diabolo. Mansi, xxvi. p. 695. Wickliffe denied having written or spoken the sentiment here ascribed to him.
- 28 From lollen to sing; as beggars (beggars) from beggen.
- 29 A complaint of John Wycleff. Tracts and Treatises edited by the Wickliffe Society, p. 268.
- 30 Finaliter veritas vincet eos. Vaughan, Appendix, ii. p. 453.
- 31 This is the reading of the Bodleian manuscript—"and be [by] this it passes all other laws." In Foxe, Wickliffe appears to ascribe to Christ himself this superiority over all Scripture,—a distinction hardly in the mind of the reformer or of his age.
- 32 An Epistle of J. Wickliffe to Pope Urban VI. Foxe, Acts, i. p. 507, fol. Lend. 1684; also Lewis (Wickliffe), p. 333, Append.
- 33 Ideo si essent centum papa;, et omnes fratres essent versi in cardinales, non deberet concedi sententiae suae in materia fidei, nisi de quanto se fundaverint in Scriptura. Trialogus, lib. iv. cap. vii.
- 34 Vaughan's Life of Wickliffe, ii. p. 210, 257
- 35 De universalibus realibus.
- 36 Auctoritas Scripturae sacrae, quae est lex Christi, infinitum excedit quam libet scripturam aliam. Dialog. [Trialogus] lib. iii. cap. xxx.; see in particular cap. xxxi.
- 37 Ibid. de predestinatione, de peccato, de gratia, &c.
- 38 Ibid. lib. iii. cap. xxx.
- 39 Fidem a Dee infusam sine aliqua trepidatione fidei contraria. Ibid. lib. iii. cap. ii.
- 40 Secundum rationem spiritualis et virtualis existentiae. Ibid. lib. iv. cap. Viii.
- 41 Fuit idem presbyter atque episcopus. Ibid. lib. iv. cap. xv.
- 42 Vaughan's Life of Wickliffe, ii. p. 307. The Christian public is much indebted to Dr Vaughan for his biography of this reformer.
- 43 Multitude fratrum mortem tuam multipliciter machinantur. Dialog., lib. iv. cap. iv.
- 44 Aliqui fratres quos Deus docere dignaturrelicta sua perfidia redibunt libere ad religionem Christi primaevam, et tune aedificabunt ecchsiam, sicut Paulus. Ibid., lib. iv. cap. xxx.
- 45 John Huss in Bohemia.

- 46 Assistere solent gladio et pelta stipati ad eorum defensionem.. Knyghton, lib. v. p. 2660.
- 47 Milites cum ducibus et comitibus erant praecipue eis adhaerentes. Ibid.
- 48 Quasi germinantes multiplicati sunt nimis et impleverunt ubique orbem regni. Ibid. These “Conclusiones” are reprinted by Lewis (Wickliffe), p. 337.
- 49 Rex et episcopus in una persona, 3c. Knyghton, lib. v. p. 2660.
- 50 Foxe, Acts, i. p. 584, fol. Lend. 1684.
- 51 Ibid. p. 586. This is the statute known as 2 Henry IV. c. 15, the first actual law in England against heresy.
- 52 Ibid. p. 589.
- 53 Not of pure man but of true God, here in earth. Ibid. p. 596.
- 54 “Jesus is my love.” These words are still to be read in the tower.
- 55 Blackmore.
- 56 Eorum praedicationibus nefariis interfuit, et contradictores, si quos repererat minis et terroribus et gladii secularis potentia compescuit. Rymer, Foedera, tom. iv. pars 2, p. 50.
- 57 Foxe, Acts, vol. i. p. 636, fol.
- 58 Ibid. p. 637.
- 59 Quod nullam absolutionem in hac parts peteret a nobis, sed a solo Deo. Rymer, Foedera, p. 51.
- 60 Incendio propter Deum, suspensio propter regem. Thom. waldensis ‘•.a proemio. Raynald, ann. 1414. No 16.