

THE HISTORY
OF
PROTESTANTISM

BY THE
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WITH FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE BEST ARTISTS

“PROTESTANTISM, THE SACRED CAUSE OF GOD’S LIGHT AND TRUTH AGAINST THE
DEVIL’S FALSITY AND DARKNESS.”—*Carlyle*

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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 Præmunire.

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 tilled 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 profes-

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

² Lechler, i. 137.

sor 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 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'élire*, 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

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!

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.

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 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

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

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

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 church-yard; 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, 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 mo-

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

ment 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 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

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

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

¹² Hume, *Hist. of Eng.*, vol. 1., p. 196

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, although 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 marvelously 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

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

homage as a vassal of the Pope was heard, the nation hardly knew whether to meet it with indignation or with derision.

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

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

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

trifle may amount to £100,000. With good reason might the Carmelite, Baptist 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 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

¹⁶ “Si quid Roma dabit, nugas dabit, accipit aurum,
Verba dat, heu! Romæ nunc sola pecunia regnat.”

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

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

¹⁹ Fox, *Acts and Mon.*, vol. i., p. 551.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² D’Aubigne, *Hist. of Reform.*, vol. v., p. 103; Edin., 1853.

realm.²³ And, further, as the consequence of this transportation to other countries of the treasure of the nation, learning and the aids 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 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.

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.