

CHAPTER 18 : WYCKLIFFE, MORNINGSTAR OF THE REFORMATION

We read in Revelation 14 how after the completion of the 1,260 days (that is, years), or “42 months”, of wilderness journey, there flies an angel, “having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people”. This brings us to circa 1330 AD and the birth of the “Morningstar of the Reformation” – John Wyckliffe - in the British Isles.

At the age of sixteen or thereabouts, Wyckliffe was sent to Oxford in England. Here he became first a scholar, and next a fellow of Merton College, the oldest foundation save one in Oxford. The youth of England, athirst for knowledge, the fountains of which had long been sealed up, were then crowding to the universities, and when Wyckliffe entered Merton there were not fewer than 30,000 students at Oxford. These numbers awaken surprise, but it is to be taken into account that many of the halls were no better than upper schools. The college which Wyckliffe joined was the most distinguished at that seat of learning. One of its chairs had been filled by the celebrated Bradwardine, who was closing his career at Merton about the time that the young Wyckliffe was opening his in Oxford. Bradwardine was one of the first mathematicians and astronomers of his day; but having been drawn to the study of the Word of God, he embraced the doctrines of free grace, and his chair became a fountain of higher knowledge than that of natural science. While most of his contemporaries, by the aid of a subtle scholasticism, were endeavoring to penetrate into the essence of things, and to explain all mysteries, Bradwardine was content to accept what God had revealed in His Word, and this humility was rewarded by his finding the path which others missed. Lifting the veil, he unfolded to his students, who crowded round him with eager attention and admiring reverence, the way of life, warning them especially against that Pelagianism which was rapidly substituting a worship of externals for a religion of the heart, and teaching men to trust in their power of will for a salvation which can come only from the sovereign grace of God. Bradwardine was greater as a theologian than he had been as a philosopher. The fame of his lectures filled Europe, and his evangelical views, diffused by his scholars, helped to prepare the way for Wyckliffe and others who were to come after him. It was around his chair that the new day was seen first to break.

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

Such was the philosophy that invited the study of Wyckliffe. There was scarce enough in it to reward his labor, but he thirsted for knowledge, and giving himself to it "with his might," he soon became a master in the scholastic philosophy, and did not fear to encounter the subtlest of all the subtle disputants in the schools of Oxford. To his knowledge of scholastics he added great proficiency in both the canon and civil laws. This was a branch of knowledge which stood him in more stead in after years than the other and more fashionable science. By these studies he became versed in the constitution and laws of his native country, and was fitted for taking an intelligent part in the battle which soon thereafter arose between the usurpations of the Pontiff and the rights of the crown of England.

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

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

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

"There was no mention," says Fox, describing the early days of Wyckliffe, "nor almost any word spoken of Scripture. Instead of Peter and Paul, men occupied their time in studying Aquinas and Scotus, and the Master of Sentences." "Scarcely any other thing was seen in the temples or churches, or taught or spoken of in sermons, or finally intended or gone about in their whole life, but only heaping up of certain shadowed

ceremonies upon ceremonies; neither was there any end of their heaping. The people were taught to worship no other thing but that which they did see, and they did see almost nothing which they did not worship."

In the midst of these groveling superstitions, men were startled by the approach of a terrible visitant. The year 1348 was fatally signalized by the outbreak of a fearful pestilence, one of the most destructive in history. Appearing first in Asia, it took a westerly course, traversing the globe like the pale horse and his rider in the Apocalypse, terror marching before it, and death following in its rear. It ravaged the Shores of the Levant, it desolated Greece, and going on still toward the west, it struck Italy with terrible severity. Passing the Alps it entered Northern Europe, leaving, say some contemporary historians, only a tenth of the human race alive. This we know is an exaggeration; but it expresses the popular impression, and sufficiently indicates the awful character of those ravages, in which all men heard, as it were, the footsteps of coming death. On the 1st of August the plague touched the shores of England. "In those days," says another old chronicler, Caxton, "was death without sorrow, weddings without friendship, flying without succor; scarcely were there left living folk for to bury honestly them that were dead."

This dispensation was the harbinger of a very different one. The tempest that scathed the earth opened the way for the shower which was to fertilize it. The plague was not without its influence on that great movement which, beginning with Wyckliffe, was continued in a line of confessors, martyrs, and reformers. Wyckliffe had been a witness of the passage of the destroyer; he had seen the human race fading from off the earth as if the ages had completed their cycle, and the end of the world was at hand. He was then in his twenty-fifth year, and could not but be deeply impressed by the awful events passing around him. "This visitation of the Almighty," says D'Aubigne, "sounded like the trumpet of the judgment-day in the heart of Wyckliffe." Bradwardine had already brought him to the Bible, the plague brought him to it a second time; and now, doubtless, he searched its page more earnestly than ever. He came to it, not as the theologian, seeking in it a deeper wisdom than any mystery which the scholastic philosophy could open to him; nor as the scholar, to refine his taste by its pure models, and enrich his understanding by the sublimity of its doctrines; nor even as the polemic, in search of weapons wherewith, to assail the dominant superstitions; he now came to the Bible as a lost sinner, seeking how he might be saved. The joy of escape from a doom so terrible made him feel how small a matter is the life of the body, and how little to be regarded are the torments which the tyrants of earth have it in their power to inflict, compared with the wrath of the Ever-living God. It is in these fires that the reformers have been hardened. It is in this school that they have learned to defy death and to sing at the stake. In this armor was Wyckliffe clad before he was sent forth into the battle.

We read in Daniel 12:11: "And from the time [that] the daily [sacrifice] shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, [there shall be] a thousand two hundred and ninety days." 1,290 days (i.e., years in prophetic language) after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, Wyckliffe began his public ministry, bringing to a close the wilderness years of the church. Indeed, around 1310 AD Arnold

of Villanova had already predicted that Daniel 12's 1,290 day-years would terminate in the 14th century.

So in 1360 AD Wyckliffe was appointed to the Mastership of Balliol College, beginning his public ministry. He had become a Bachelor of Theology, and was thus accorded the privilege of giving public lectures in the university on the Books of Scripture. He was forbidden to enter the higher field of the Sentences of Peter of Lombardy — if, indeed, he was desirous of doing so. This belonged exclusively to the higher grade of Bachelors and Doctors in Theology. But the expositions he now gave of the Books of Holy Writ proved of great use to himself. He became more profoundly versed in the knowledge of divine things; and thus was the professor unwittingly prepared for the great work of reforming the church, to which the labors of his after-life were to be directed.

He was soon thereafter appointed (1365) to be head of Canterbury Hall. This was a new college, founded by Simon de Islip, 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 Wyckliffe 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 Wyckliffe from his Wardenship, appointed a new head to the college. Wyckliffe 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 Wyckliffe.

It was pending this decision that events happened which opened to Wyckliffe 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 Wyckliffe 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 conge d'elire, elected Reginald, their superior, Archbishop of Canterbury, and installed him in the archiepiscopal throne before midnight. By the next dawn Reginald was on his way to Rome, whither he had been dispatched by his brethren to solicit the Pope's confirmation of his election. When the king came to the knowledge of the transaction, he was enraged at its temerity, and set about procuring the election of the Bishop of Norwich to the primacy. Both parties — the king and the canons — sent agents to Rome to plead their cause before the Pope.

The man who then filled the chair of Peter, Innocent III, was vigorously prosecuting the audacious project of Gregory VII, of subordinating the rights and power of princes to the Papal See, and of taking into his own hands the appointment to all the episcopal sees of Christendom, that through the bishops and priests, now reduced to an absolute monarchy

entirely dependent upon the Vatican, he might govern at his will all the kingdoms of Europe. No Pope ever was more successful in this ambitious policy than the man before whom the King of England on the one hand, and the canons of Canterbury on the other, now carried their cause. Innocent annulled both elections — that of the canons and that of the king — and made his own nominee, Cardinal Langton, be chosen to the See of Canterbury. 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; the king had offended, and the whole nation must be punished along with him. Before we can realize the terrors of such a sentence, we must surrender our imaginations to the superstitious beliefs which armed the interdict with its tremendous power. The men of those times, on whom this doom fell, saw the gates of heaven locked by the strong hand of the Pontiff, so that none might enter who came from the unhappy realm lying under the Papal ban. All who departed this life must wander forlorn as disembodied ghosts in some doleful region, amid unknown sufferings, till it should please him who carried the keys to open the closed gates. As the earthly picture of this spiritual doom, all the symbols of grace and all the ordinances of religion were suspended. The church-doors were closed; the lights at the altar were extinguished; the bells ceased to be rung; the crosses and images were taken down and laid on the ground; infants were baptized 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 pretense 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.

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 offense, 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.

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. 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? 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.

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 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.

But 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 valor was felt and her power feared by the Continental nations; and when this summons to do homage as a vassal of the Pope was heard, the nation hardly knew whether to meet it with indignation or with derision.

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.

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.

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. 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.

By another Act, the revenues of all livings held by foreign ecclesiastics, cardinals, and others, were given to the king during their lives. 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."

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. 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.

This was the moment chosen by Urban V to advance his insolent demand. How often have Popes failed to read the signs of the times! Urban had signally failed to do so. The nation, though still submitting to the spiritual burdens of Rome, was becoming restive under her supremacy and pecuniary exactions. The Parliament had entered on a course of legislation to set bounds to these avaricious encroachments. The king too was getting sore

at this "defacing of the ancient laws, and spoiling of his crown," and with the laurels of Crecy on his brow, he was in no mood for repairing to Rome as Urban commanded, and paying down a thousand marks for permission to wear the crown which he was so well able to defend with his sword. Edward assembled his Parliament in 1366, and, laying the Pope's letter before it, bade it take counsel and say what answer should be returned. Not a voice was raised in support of the arrogant demand of Urban. Prelate, baron, and commoner united in repudiating it as insulting to England; and these men expressed themselves in that plain, brief, and pithy language which betokens deep conviction as well as determined resolution. If need were, these bold words would be followed by deeds equally bold. The hands of the barons were on the hilts of their swords as they uttered them. They were, in the first place, subjects of England; and, in the second place, members of the Church of Rome. The Pope accounts no one a good Catholic who does not reverse this order and put his spiritual above his temporal allegiance — his Church before his country. This firm attitude of the Parliament put an end to the matter. The question which Urban had really raised was this, and nothing less than this: Shall the Pope or the king be sovereign of England? The answer of the Parliament was, "Not the Pope, but the king;" and from that hour the claim of the former was not again advanced, at least in explicit terms.

The decision at which the Parliament arrived was unanimous. It reproduced in brief compass both the argument and spirit of the speeches. Few such replies were in those days carried to the foot of the Papal throne. "Forasmuch" — so ran the decision of the three estates of the realm — "as neither King John, nor any other king, could bring his realm and kingdom into such thralldom and subjection but by common assent of Parliament, the which was not given, therefore that which he did was against his oath at his coronation, besides many other causes. If, therefore, the Pope should attempt anything against the king by process, or other matters in deed, the king, with all his subjects, should, with all their force and power, resist the same."

Thus far had England, in the middle of the fourteenth century, advanced on the road to the Reformation. The estates of the realm had unanimously repudiated one of the two great branches of the Papacy. The dogma of the vicarship binds up the spiritual and the temporal in one anomalous jurisdiction. England had denied the latter; and this was a step towards questioning, and finally repudiating, the former. It was quite natural that the nation should first discover the falsity of the temporal supremacy, before seeing the equal falsity of the spiritual. Urban had put the matter in a light in which no one could possibly mistake it. In demanding payment of a thousand marks annually, he translated, as we say, the theory of the temporal supremacy into a palpable fact. The theory might have passed a little longer without question, had it not been put into this ungracious form. The halo which encompassed the Papal fabric during the Middle Ages began to wane, and men took courage to criticize a system whose immense prestige had blinded them hitherto. Such was the state of mind in which we now find the English nation. It betokened a reformation at no very great distance.

But largely, indeed mainly, had Wyckliffe contributed to bring about this state of feeling in England. He had been the teacher of the barons and commons. He had propounded

these doctrines from his chair in Oxford before they were proclaimed by the assembled estates of the realm. But for the spirit and views with which he had been quietly leavening the nation, the demand of Urban might have met a different reception. It would not, we believe, have been complied with; the position England had now attained in Europe, and the deference paid her by foreign nations, would have made submission impossible; but without Wyckliffe the resistance would not have been placed on so intelligible a ground, nor would it have been urged with so resolute a patriotism. The firm attitude assumed effectually extinguished the hopes of the Vatican, and rid England ever after of all such imitating and insolent demands.

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

Wyckliffe took up the challenge which had been thrown down to him. The controversy was conducted on Wyckliffe's side with great moderation. He contents himself with stating the grounds of objection to the temporal power, rather than working out the argument and pressing it home. These are — the natural rights of men, the laws of the realm of England, and the precepts of Holy Writ. "Already," he says, "a third and more of England is in the hands of the Pope. There cannot," he argues, "be two temporal sovereigns in one country; either Edward is king or Urban is king. We make our choice. We accept Edward of England and refuse Urban of Rome." Then he falls back on the debate in Parliament, and presents a summary of the speeches of the spiritual and temporal lords. Thus far Wyckliffe puts the estates of the realm in the front, and covers himself with the shield of their authority: but doubtless the sentiments are his; the stamp of his individuality and genius is plainly to be seen upon them. From his bow was the arrow shot by which the temporal power of the Papacy in England was wounded. If his courage was shown in not declining the battle, his prudence and wisdom were equally conspicuous in the manner in which he conducted it. It was the affair of the king and of the nation, and not his merely; and it was masterly tactics to put it so as that it might be seen to be no contemptible quarrel between an unknown monk and an Oxford doctor, but a controversy between the King of England and the Pontiff of Rome.

And the service now rendered by Wyckliffe was great. The eyes of all the European nations were at that moment on England, watching with no little anxiety the issue of the

conflict which she was then waging with a power that sought to reduce the whole earth to vassalage. If England should bow herself before the Papal chair, and the victor of Crecy do homage to Urban for his crown, what monarch could hope to stand erect, and what nation could expect to rescue its independence from the grasp of the tiara? The submission of England would bring such an accession of prestige and strength to the Papacy, that the days of Innocent III would return, and a tempest of excommunications and interdicts would again lower over every throne, and darken the sky of every kingdom, as during the reign of the mightiest of the Papal chiefs. The crisis was truly a great one. It was now to be seen whether the tide was to advance or to go back. The decision of England determined that the waters of Papal tyranny should henceforth recede, and every nation hailed the result with joy as a victory won for itself. To England the benefits which accrued from this conflict were lasting as well as great.

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

The rise of the monastic orders, and their rapid and prodigious diffusion over all Christendom, and even beyond it, are too well known to require minute or lengthy narration. But despite its successful diffusion, in point of fact, the monastic system was in violation of the fundamental laws of nature and of society, as well as of the Bible. How

can virtue be cultivated apart from the exercise of it? If the world is a theater of temptation, it is still more a school of discipline, and a nursery of virtue. These monasteries did, we know, become eventually more corrupt than the world which their inmates had forsaken.

The damage inflicted on the Papacy by the corruption and notorious profligacy of the monks must be repaired — but how? The reformation of the early orders was hopeless; but new fraternities could be called into existence. This was the method adopted. The order of Franciscans was instituted by Innocent III in the year 1215, and the Dominicans were sanctioned by his successor Honorius III a few years later (1218). The object of their institution was to recover, by means of their humility, poverty, and apostolic zeal, the credit which had been lost to the Church through the pride, wealth, and indolence of the elder monks. Moreover, the new times on which the Church felt that she was entering, demanded new services. Preachers were needed to confute the heretics, and this was carefully kept in view in the constitution of the newly-created orders.

The founders of these two orders were very unlike in their natural disposition and temper. St. Francis, the founder of the Franciscans, or Minorites, as they came to be termed, was born at Assisi, in Umbria, in 1182. His father was a rich merchant of that town. Francis grew up "a debauched youth," says D'Emilliane, "and, having robbed his father, was disinherited, but he seemed not to be very much troubled at it." He was seized with a malignant fever, and the frenzy that it induced appears never to have wholly left him. He lay down on his bed of sickness a gay profligate and spendthrift, and he rose up from it entirely engrossed with the idea that all holiness and virtue consisted in poverty. He acted out his theory to the letter. He gave away all his property, he exchanged garments with a beggar whom he met on the highway; and, squalid, emaciated, covered with dirt and rags, his eyes burning with a strange fire, he wandered about the country around his native town of Assisi, followed by a crowd of boys, who hooted and jeered at the madman, which they believed him to be. Being joined by seven disciples, he made his way to Rome, to lay his project before the Pope. On arriving there he found Innocent III on the terrace of his palace of the Lateran. The eye of the Pontiff lights upon the strange figure. Innocent halts to survey more closely the man. His dress is that of a beggar, his looks are haggard, his eye is wild, yet despite these untoward appearances there is something about him that seems to say, "I come with a mission, and therefore do I venture into this presence. I am here not to beg, but to give alms to the Popedom;" and few kings have had it in their power to lay greater gifts at the feet of Rome than that which this man in rags had come to bestow. Curious to know what he would say, Innocent permitted his strange visitor to address him. Francis hurriedly described his project; but the Pope failed to comprehend its importance, or to credit Francis with the power of carrying it out; he ordered the enthusiast to be gone; and Francis retired, disappointed and downcast, believing his scheme to be nipped in the bud. The Pope eventually gave orders to seek out the strange man from Umbria, and bring him before him. Convening his cardinals, he gave them an opportunity of hearing the project. To Innocent and his conclave the idea of Francis appeared to be good; and to whom, thought they, could they better commit the carrying of it out than to the enthusiast who had conceived it? To this man in rags did Rome now give her commission. Armed with the Pontifical sanction, empowering him to

found, arrange, and set a-working such an order as he had sketched out, Francis now left the presence of the Pope and cardinals, and departed to begin his work. Soon St. Francis found a dozen men willing to share his views and take part in his project. The dozen speedily multiplied into a hundred, and the hundred into thousands, and the increase went on at a rate of which history scarcely affords another such example. Before his death, St. Francis had the satisfaction of seeing 5,000 of his monks assemble in his convent in Italy to hold a general chapter, and as each convent sent only two delegates, the convocation represented 2,500 convents. The solitary fanatic had become an army; his disciples filled all the countries of Christendom; every object and idea they subordinated to that of their chief; and, bound together by their vow, they prosecuted with indefatigable zeal the service to which they had consecrated themselves.

St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominicans, was born in Arragon, 1170. He was cast in a different mold from St. Francis. His enthusiasm was as fiery, his zeal as intense; but to these qualities he added a cool judgment, a firm will, a somewhat stern temper, and great knowledge of affairs. Dominic had witnessed the ravages of heresy in the southern provinces of France; he had also had occasion to mark the futility of those splendidly equipped missions, that Rome sent forth from time to time to convert the Albigenses. He saw that these missionaries left more heretics on their departure than they had found on their arrival. Mitered dignitaries, mounted on richly caparisoned mules, followed by a sumptuous train of priests and monks, and other attendants, too proud or too ignorant to preach, and able only to dazzle the gaze of the multitude by the magnificence of their ceremonies, attested most conclusively the wealth of Rome, but did not attest with equal conclusiveness the truth of her tenets. Instead of bishops on palfreys, Dominic called for monks in wooden soles to preach to the heretics. Repairing to Rome, he too laid his scheme before Innocent, offering to raise an army that would perambulate Europe in the interests of the Papal See, organized after a different fashion, and that, he hoped, would be able to give a better account of the heretics. Their garb as humble, their habits as austere, and their speech as plain as those of the peasants they were to address, these missionaries would soon win the heretics from the errors into which they had been seduced; and, living on alms, they would cost the Papal exchequer nothing. Innocent, for some reason or other, perhaps from having sanctioned the Franciscans so recently, refused his consent. But Pope Honorius was more compliant; he confirmed the proposed order of Dominic; and from beginnings equally small with those of the Franciscans, the growth of the Dominicans in popularity and numbers was equally rapid. The Dominicans were divided into two bands. The business of the one was to preach, that of the other to slay those whom the first were not able to convert.

Before proceeding to speak of the battle which Wyckliffe was called to wage with the new fraternities, it is necessary to indicate the peculiarities in their constitution and organization that fitted them to cope with the emergencies amid which their career began, and which had made it necessary to call them into existence. The newly-created orders were not confined to a particular spot. They had convents, it is true, but these were rather hotels or temporary abodes, where they might rest when on their preaching tours. Their sphere was the world; they were to perambulate provinces and cities, and to address all who were willing to listen to them. Preaching had come to be one of the lost arts. The

secular or parochial clergy seldom entered a pulpit; they were too ignorant to write a sermon, too indolent to preach one even were it prepared to their hand. They instructed their flocks by a service of ceremonials, and by prayers and litanies, in a language which the people did not understand. Wyckliffe assures us that in his time "there were many unable curates that knew not the Ten Commandments, nor could read their psalter, nor could understand a verse of it." The friars, on the other hand, betook themselves to their mother tongue, and, mingling familiarly with all classes of the community, they revived the forgotten practice of preaching, and plied it assiduously Sunday and week-day. They held forth in all places, as well as on all days, erecting their pulpit in the market, at the streetscorner, or in the chapel. In one point especially the friars stood out in marked and advantageous contrast to the old monastic orders. The latter were scandalously rich, the former were severely and edifyingly poor. They lived on alms, and literally were beggars; hence their name of Mendicants.

If the rise of the Mendicant orders was unexampled in its rapidity, equally unexampled was the rapidity of their decline. The rock on which they split was the same which had proved so fatal to their predecessors — riches. But how was it possible for wealth to enter when the door of the monastery was so effectually barred by a most stringent vow of poverty? Neither as individuals nor as a corporation, could they accept or hold a penny. Nevertheless, the fact was so; their riches increased prodigiously, and their degeneracy, consequent thereon, was even more rapid than the declension which former ages had witnessed in the Benedictines and Augustinians. The original constitution of the Mendicant orders remained unaltered, their vow of poverty still stood unrepealed; they still lived on the alms of the faithful, and still wore their gown of coarse woolen cloth, white in the case of the Dominicans, and girded with a broad sash; brown in the case of the Franciscans, and tied with a cord of three knots: in both cases curiously provided with numerous and capacious pouches, in which little images, square bits of paper, amulets, and rosaries, were mixed with bits of bread and cheese, morsels of flesh, and other victuals collected by begging. But in the midst of all these signs of poverty, and of the professed observance of their vow, their hoards increased every day. How came this? Among the brothers were some subtle intellects, who taught them the happy distinction between proprietors and stewards. In the character of proprietors they could possess absolutely nothing; in the character of stewards they might hold wealth to any amount, and dispense it for the ends and uses of their order. This ingenious distinction unlocked the gates of their convents, and straightway a stream of gold, fed by the piety of their admirers, began to flow into them. They did not, like the other monastic fraternities, become landed proprietors — this kind of property not coming within the scope of that interpretation by which they had so materially qualified their vow — but in other respects they claimed a very ample freedom. The splendor of their edifices eclipsed those of the Benedictines and Augustinians. Churches which the skill of the architect and the genius of the painter did their utmost to glorify, convents and cloisters which monarchs might have been proud to inhabit, rose in all countries for the use of the friars. With this wealth came a multiform corruption — indolence, insolence, a dissolution of manners, and a grievous abuse of those vast privileges and powers which the Papal See, finding them so useful, had heaped upon them. "It is an awful presage," exclaims Matthew Paris, only forty years after their institution, "that in 300 years, nay, in 400 years and more, the old

monastic orders have not so entirely degenerated as these fraternities."

Such was the state in which Wyckliffe found the friars. It was in 1360 that he began his public opposition to them. The Dominican friars entered England in 1321. In that year Gilbert de Fresney and twelve of his brethren settled at Oxford. The same causes that favored their growth on the Continent operated equally in England, and this little band recruited their ranks so rapidly, that soon they spread their swarms over all the kingdom. Forty-three houses of the Dominicans were established in England, where, from their black cloak and hood, they were popularly termed the Black Friars. Wyckliffe stood up and began that opposition to the Mendicants which he maintained more or less to the very close of his life. "John Wyckliffe," says an unknown writer, "the singular ornament of his time, began at Oxford in the year of our Lord 1360, in his public lectures, to correct the abuses of the clergy, and their open wickedness, King Edward III being living, and continued secure a most valiant champion of the truth among the tyrants of Sodom."

Wyckliffe saw deeper into the evil than others. The very institution of the order was unscriptural and corrupt, and while it existed, nothing, he felt, but abuse could flow from it; and therefore, not content with the reformation of the order, he demanded its abolition. The friars, vested in an independent jurisdiction by the Pope, were overriding the canons and regulations of Oxford, where their head-quarters were pitched; they were setting at defiance the laws of the State; they were inveigling young children into their "rotten habit;" they were perambulating the country; and while they would allow no one but themselves to preach, their sermons were made up, Wyckliffe tells us, "of fables, chronicles of the world, and stories from the siege of Troy." The Pope, moreover, had conferred on them the right of shriving men; and they performed their office with such a hearty good-will, and gave absolution on terms so easy, that malefactors of every description flocked to them for pardon, and the consequence was a frightful increase of immorality and crime. The alms which ought to have been given to the "bed-ridden, the feeble, the crooked," they intercepted and devoured. In flagrant contempt of the declared intention of their founder, and their own vow of poverty, their hoards daily increased. The wealth thus gathered they expended in palatial buildings, in sumptuous tables, or other delights; or they sent it abroad to the impoverishing of the kingdom. Not the money only, but the secrets of the nation they were suspected of discovering to the enemies of the realm. To obey the Pope, to pray to St. Francis, to give alms to the friar, were the sum of all piety. This was better than all learning and all virtue, for it could open the gates of heaven. Wyckliffe saw nothing in the future, provided the Mendicants were permitted to carry on their trade, but the speedy ruin of both Church and State.

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

Mendicants and the gospel. This was a question which the England of that age eminently needed to have stirred.

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

About this time he published his *Objections to Friars*, which fairly launched him on his career as a Reformer. In this tractate he charges the friars with "fifty heresies and errors, and many moe, if men wole seke them well out." Let us mark that in this tract the Reformer does not so much dispute with the friars as preach the Gospel to his countrymen. "There cometh," says Wyckliffe, "no pardon but of God." "The worst abuses of these friars consist in their pretended confessions, by means of which they affect, with numberless artifices of blasphemy, to purify those whom they confess, and make them clear from all pollution in the eyes of God, setting aside the commandments and satisfaction of our Lord."

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

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

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

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

The grievances were continued nevertheless, and became even more intolerable. The Parliament addressed a new remonstrance to the king, setting forth the unbearable nature of these oppressions, and the injury they were doing to the royal authority, and praying him to take action on the point. Accordingly, in 1373, the king appointed four commissioners to proceed to Avignon, where Pope Gregory XI was residing, and laying the complaints of the English nation before him, request that for the future he would forbear meddling with the reservations of benefices. The ambassadors were courteously received, but they could obtain no redress. The Parliament renewed their complaint and request that "remedy be provided against the provisions of the Pope, whereby he reaps the first-fruits of ecclesiastical dignities, the treasure of the realm being thereby conveyed away, which they cannot bear." A Royal Commission was issued in 1374 to inquire into the number of ecclesiastical benefices and dignities in England held by aliens, and to estimate their exact value. It was found that the number of livings in the hands of Italians, Frenchmen, and other foreigners was so great that, says Fox, "were it all set down, it would fill almost half a quire of paper." The clergy of England was rapidly becoming an alien and a merely nominal one. The sums drained from the kingdom were immense.

The king resolved to make another attempt to arrange this matter with the Papal court. He named another commission, and it is an evidence of the growing influence of Wyckliffe that his name stands second on the list of these delegates.

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

There is cause, indeed, to suspect that the interests of England were betrayed in this negotiation. The Bishop of Bangor, on whom the conduct of the embassy chiefly devolved, on his return home was immediately translated to the See of Hereford, and in 1389 to that of St. David's. His promotion, in both instances the result of Papal provisors, bore the appearance of being the reward of subserviency. Wyckliffe returned home in disgust at the time which had been wasted, and the little fruit which had been obtained. But these two years were to him far from lost years. Wyckliffe had come into communication with the Italian, Spanish, and French dignitaries of the Church, who enjoyed the confidence of the Pope and the cardinals. There was given him an insight into

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

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

upon the clergy, which he sometimes expended in subsidizing the enemies of the country; that "God hath given His sheep to the Pope to be pastured, and not shorn and shaven;" that "therefore it would be good to renew all the statutes against provisions from Rome," and that "no Papal collector or proctor should remain in England, upon pain of life and limb; and that no Englishman, on the like pain, should become such collector or proctor, or remain at the court of Rome."

In February, 1372, there appeared in England an agent of the Pope, named Arnold Garnier, who traveled with a suite of servants and six horses through England, and after remaining uninterruptedly two and a half years in the country, went back to Rome with no inconsiderable sum of money. He had a royal license to return to England, of which he afterwards made use. He was required to swear that in collecting the Papal dues he would protect the rights and interests of the crown and the country. He took the oath in 1372 in the Palace of Westminster, in presence of the councilors and dignitaries of the crown. The fears of patriots were in no way allayed by the ready oath of the Papal agent; and Wyckliffe in especial wrote a treatise to show that he had sworn to do what was a contradiction and an impossibility.

It was Wyckliffe who breathed this spirit into the Commons of England, and emboldened them to fight this battle for the prerogatives of their prince, and their own rights as the free subjects of an independent realm. We recognize his graphic and trenchant style in the document of the Parliament. The Pope stormed when he found the gage of battle thrown down in this bold fashion. With an air of defiance he hastened to take it up, by appointing an Italian to an English benefice. But the Parliament stood firm; the temporal Lords sided with the Commons. "We will support the crown," said they, "against the tiara." The Lords spiritual adopted a like course; reserving their judgment on the ecclesiastical sentences of the Pope, they held that the temporal effects of his sentences were null, and that the Papal power availed nothing in that point against the royal prerogative. The nation rallied in support of the Estates of the Realm. It pronounced no equivocal opinion when it styled the Parliament which had enacted these stringent edicts against the Papal bulls and agents "the Good Parliament." The Pope languidly maintained the conflict for a few years, but he was compelled ultimately to give way before the firm attitude of the nation. The statutes no longer remained a dead letter. They were enforced against every attempt to carry out the Papal appointments in England. Thus were the prerogatives of the sovereign and the independence of the country vindicated, and a victory achieved.

This was the second great defeat which Rome had sustained. England had refused to be a fief of the Papal See by withholding the tribute to Urban; and now, by repelling the Pontifical jurisdiction, she claimed to be mistress in her own territory. The clergy divined the quarter whence these rebuffs proceeded. The real author of this movement, which was expanding every day, was at little pains to conceal himself. Ever since his return from Brages, Wyckliffe had felt a new power in his soul, propelling him onward in this war. The unscriptural constitution and blasphemous assumptions of the Papacy had been more fully disclosed to him, and he began to oppose it with a boldness, an eloquence, and a force of argument which he had not till now been able to wield. Through many channels was he leavening the nation — his chair in Oxford; his pulpit in Lutterworth; the

Parliament, whose debates and edicts he inspired; and the court, whose policy he partly molded. His sentiments were finding an echo in public opinion. The tide was rising. The hierarchy took the alarm. They cried for help, and the Pope espoused their cause, which was not theirs only, but his as well. "The whole glut of monks or begging friars," says Fox, "were set in a rage or madness, which (even as hornets with their stings) did assail this good man on every side, fighting (as is said) for their altars, paunches, and bellies. After them the priests, and then after them the archbishop took the matter in hand, being then Simon Sudbury."

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

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

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

The university was commanded to take care that tares did not spring up among its wheat, and that from its chairs propositions were not taught "detestable and damnable, tending to subvert the state of the whole Church, and even of the civil government." The bull addressed to the bishops was expressed in terms still more energetic. The Pope could not help wishing that the Rector of Lutterworth and Professor of Divinity "was not a master

of errors, and had run into a kind of detestable wickedness, not only and openly publishing, but also vomiting out of the filthy dungeon of his breast divers professions, false and erroneous conclusions, and most wicked and damnable heresies, whereby he might defile the faithful sort, and bring them from the right path headlong into the way of perdition." They were therefore to apprehend the said John Wyckliffe, to shut him up in prison, to send all proofs and evidence of his heresy to the Pope, taking care that the document was securely sealed, and entrusted to a faithful messenger, and that meanwhile they should retain the prisoner in safe custody, and await further instructions.

The zeal of the bishops anticipated the orders of the Pope. Before the bulls had arrived in England the prosecution of Wyckliffe was begun. At the instance of Courtenay, Bishop of London, Wyckliffe was cited to appear on the 19th of February, 1377, in Our Lady's Chapel in St. Paul's, to answer for his teaching. The rumor of what was going on got wind in London, and when the day came a great crowd assembled at the door of St. Paul's. Wyckliffe, attended by two powerful friends — John, Duke of Lancaster, better known as John of Gaunt, and Lord Percy, Earl Marshal of England — appeared at the skirts of the assemblage. The Duke of Lancaster and Wyckliffe had first met, it is probable, at Bruges, where it chanced to both to be on a mission at the same time. Lancaster held the Reformer in high esteem, on political if not on religious grounds. Favoring his opinions, he resolved to go with him and show him countenance before the tribunal of the bishops.

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

"Percy," said Bishop Courtenay, sharply — more offended, it is probable, at seeing the humble Rector of Lutterworth so powerfully befriended, than at the tumult which their entrance had created — "if I had known what masteries you would have kept in the church, I would have stopped you from coming in hither." "He shall keep such masteries," said John of Gaunt, gruffly, "though you say nay."

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

"He must and shall stand," said Courtenay, still more chafed; "it is unreasonable that one on his trial before his ordinary should sit." "Lord Percy's proposal is but reasonable," interposed the Duke of Lancaster; "and as for you," said he, addressing Bishop Courtenay, "who are grown so arrogant and proud, I will bring down the pride not of you alone, but that of all the prelaty in England."

To this menace the bishop calmly replied "that his trust was in no friend on earth, but in God." This answer but the more inflamed the anger of the duke, and the altercation became yet warmer, till at last John of Gaunt was heard to say that "rather than take such

words from the bishop, he would drag him out of the court by the hair of the head."

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

The issues of the affair were favorable to the Reformation. The hierarchy had received a check, and the cause of Wyckliffe began to be more widely discussed and better understood by the nation. At this juncture events happened in high places which tended to shield the Reformer and his opinions. Edward III, who had reigned with glory, but lived too long for his fame, now died (June 21st, 1377). His yet more renowned son, the Black Prince, had preceded him to the grave, leaving as heir to the throne a child of eleven years, who succeeded on his grandfather's death, under the title of Richard II. His mother, the dowager Princess of Wales, was a woman of spirit, friendly to the sentiments of Wyckliffe, and not afraid, as we shall see, to avow them. The new sovereign, two months after his accession, assembled his first Parliament. It was composed of nearly the same men as the "Good Parliament" which had passed such stringent edicts against the "provisions" and other usurpations of the Pope. The new Parliament was disposed to carry the war against the Papacy a step farther than its predecessor had done. It summoned Wyckliffe to its councils. His influence was plainly growing. The trusted commissioner of princes, the counselor of Parliaments, he had become a power in England. We do not wonder that the Pope singled him out as the man to be struck down. While the bulls which were meant to crush the Reformer were still on their way to England, the Parliament unequivocally showed the confidence it had in his wisdom and integrity, by submitting the following question to him: "Whether the Kingdom of England might not lawfully, in case of necessity, detain and keep back the treasure of the Kingdom for its defense, that it be not carried away to foreign and strange nations, the Pope himself demanding and requiring the same, under pain of censure." This appears a very plain matter to us, but our ancestors of the fourteenth century found it encompassed with great difficulties. The best and bravest of England at that day were scared by the ghostly threat with which the Pope accompanied his demand, and they durst not refuse it till assured by Wyckliffe that it was a matter in which the Pope had no right to command, and in which they incurred no sin and no danger by disobedience. Nothing could better show the thralldom in which our fathers were held, and the slow and laborious steps by which they found their way out of the house of their bondage.

But out of what matter did the question now put to Wyckliffe arise? It related to an affair which must have been peculiarly irritating to Englishmen. The Popes were then enduring

their "Babylonish captivity," as they called their residence at Avignon. All through the reign of Edward III, the Papacy, banished from Rome, had made its abode on the banks of the Rhone. One result of this was that each time the Papal chair became vacant it was filled with a Frenchman. The sympathies of the French Pope were, of course, with his native country, in the war now waging between France and England, and it was natural to suppose that part at least of the treasure which the Popes received from England went to the support of the war on the French side. Not only was the country drained of its wealth, but that wealth was turned against the country from which it was taken. Should this be longer endured? It was generally believed that at that moment the Pope's collectors had a large sum in their hands ready to send to Avignon, to be employed, like that sent already to the same quarter, in paying soldiers to fight against England. Had they not better keep this gold at home? Wyckliffe's reply was in the affirmative, and the grounds of his opinion were briefly and plainly stated. He did not argue the point on the canon law, or on the law of England, but on that of nature and the Bible. God, he said, had given to every society the power of self-preservation; and any power given by God to any society or nation may, without doubt, be used for the end for which it was given. This gold was England's own, and might unquestionably be retained for England's use and defense. But it might be objected, Was not the Pope, as God's vice-regent, supreme proprietor of all the temporalities, of all the sees and religious corporations in Christendom? It was on the ground of his temporal supremacy that he demanded this money, and challenged England at its peril to retain it. But who, replied the Reformer, gave the Pope this temporal supremacy? I do not find it in the Bible. The Apostle Peter could give the Pope only what he himself possessed, and Peter possessed no temporal lordship. The Pope, argued Wyckliffe, must choose between the apostleship and the kingship; if he prefers to be a king, then he can claim nothing of us in the character of an Apostle; or should he abide by his apostleship, even then he cannot claim this money, for neither Peter nor any one of the Apostles ever imposed a tax upon Christians; they were supported by the free-will offerings of those to whom they ministered. What England gave to the Papacy she gave not as a tribute, but as alms. But alms could not be righteously demanded unless when the claimant was necessitous. Was the Papacy so? Were not its coffers overflowing? Was not England the poorer of the two? Her necessities were great, occasioned by a two-fold drain, the exactions of the Popes and the burdens of the war. Let charity, then, begin at home, and let England, instead of sending her money to these poor men of Avignon, who are clothed in purple and fare sumptuously every day, keep her own gold for her own uses. Thus did the Reformer lead on his countrymen, step by step, as they were able to follow.

Meanwhile, the three bulls of the Pope had arrived in England. The one addressed to the king found Edward in his grave. That sent to the university was but coldly welcomed. Not in vain had Wyckliffe taught so many years in its halls. Oxford, moreover, had too great a regard for its own fame to extinguish the brightest luminary it contained. But the bull addressed to the bishops found them in a different mood. Alarm and rage possessed these prelates. Mainly by the instrumentality of Wyckliffe had England been rescued from sheer vassalage to the Papal See. It was he, too, who had put an extinguisher upon the Papal nominations, thereby vindicating the independence of the English Church. He had next defended the right of the nation to dispose of its own property, in defiance of the

ghostly terrors by which the Popes strove to divert it into their own coffers. Thus, guided by his counsel, and fortified by the sanction of his name, the Parliament was marching on and adopting one bold measure after another. The penetrating genius of the man, his sterling uprightness, his cool, cautious, yet fearless courage, made the humble Rector of Lutterworth a formidable antagonist. Besides, his deep insight into the Papal system enabled him to lead the Parliament and nation of England, so that they were being drawn on unawares to deny not merely the temporal claims, but the spiritual authority also of Rome. The acts of resistance which had been offered to the Papal power were ostensibly limited to the political sphere, but they were done on principles which impinged on the spiritual authority, and could have no other issue than the total overthrow of the whole fabric of the Roman power in England. This was what the hierarchy foresaw; the arrival of the Papal bulls, therefore, was hailed by them with delight, and they lost no time in acting upon them.

The primate summoned Wyckliffe to appear before him in April, 1378. The court was to sit in the archbishop's chapel at Lambeth. When the day came, a crowd quite as great as and more friendly to the Reformer than that which besieged the doors of St. Paul's on occasion of his first appearance, surrounded the Palace of Lambeth, on the right bank of the Thames, opposite Westminster, where several councils had been held since the times of Anselm of Canterbury. Wyckliffe now stood high in popular favor as a patriot, although his claims as a theologian and Reformer were not yet acknowledged, or indeed understood. Hence this popular demonstration in his favor.

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

A formidable list of charges had been handed to Wyckliffe along with his citation. The substance of his defense it is important to note, because it enables us to measure the progress of the Reformer's own emancipation: and the stages of Wyckliffe's enlightenment are just the stages of the Reformation. We now stand beside the cradle of Protestantism in England, and we behold the nation, roused from its deep sleep by the Reformer's voice, making its first essay to find the road of liberty. If a little noise accompanies these efforts, if crowds assemble, and raise fanatical cries, and scare prelates on the judgment-seat, this rudeness must be laid at the door of those who had withheld that instruction which would have taught the people to reform religion without violating the laws, and to utter their condemnation of falsehoods without indulging their passions against persons. Would it have been better that England should have lain still in her chains, than that she should disturb the repose of dignified ecclesiastics by her efforts to break them? There may be some who would have preferred the torpor of slavery. But, after all, how harmless the tumults which accompanied the awakening of the English people in the fourteenth century, compared with the tragedies, the revolutions, the massacres, and the wars, amid which we have seen nations since — which slept on while England awoke — inaugurate their liberties! The paper handed in by Wyckliffe to his judges, stripped of its scholastic form — for after the manner of the schools it begins with a few axioms, runs out in numerous divisions, and reaches its conclusions through a long series of nice disquisitions and distinctions — is in substance as follows: — That the Popes have no political dominion, and that their kingdom is one of a spiritual sort only; that their spiritual authority is not absolute, so as that they may be judged of none but God; on the contrary, the Pope may fall into sin like other men, and when he does so he ought to be reprov'd, and brought back to the path of duty by his cardinals; and if they are remiss in calling him to account, the inferior clergy and even the laity "may medicinally reprove him and implead him, and reduce him to lead a better life;" that the Pope has no supremacy over the temporal possessions of the clergy and the religious houses, in which some priests have vested him, the better to evade the taxes and burdens which their sovereign for the necessities of the State imposes upon their temporalities; that no priest is at liberty to enforce temporal demands by spiritual censures; that the power of the priest in absolving or condemning is purely ministerial; that absolution will profit no one unless along with it there comes the pardon of God, nor will excommunication hurt any one unless by sin he has exposed himself to the anger of the great Judge.

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

Could Wyckliffe have dispelled the belief in the Pope's binding and loosing power, he

would have completely rent the fetters which enchained the conscience of his nation. Knowing that the better half of his country's slavery lay in the thralldom of its conscience, Wyckliffe, in setting free its soul, would virtually, by a single stroke, have achieved the emancipation of England.

There was another matter to which Wyckliffe often returned, because he held it as second only in importance to "the power of the keys." This was the property of the Church. The Church was already not only enormously rich, but she had even proclaimed a dogma which was an effectual preventive against that wealth ever being less by so much as a single penny; nay, which secured that her accumulations should go on while the world stood. What is given to the Church, said the canon law, is given to God; it is a devoted thing, consecrated and set apart for ever to a holy use, and never can it be employed for any secular or worldly end whatever; and he who shall withdraw any part thereof from the Church robs God, and commits the awful sin of sacrilege. Over the man, whoever he might be, whether temporal baron or spiritual dignitary, who should presume to subtract so much as a single acre from her domains or a single penny from her coffers, the canon law suspended a curse. This wealth could not even be recovered: it was the Church's sole, absolute, and eternal inheritance. This grievance was aggravated by the circumstance that these large possessions were exempt from taxes and public burdens. The clergy kept no connection with the country farther than to prey on it. The third Council of the Lateran forbade all laics, under the usual penalties, to exact any taxes from the clergy, or lay any contributions upon them or upon their Churches. If, however, the necessities of the State were great, and the lands of the laity insufficient, the priests might, of their own good pleasure, grant a voluntary subsidy. The fourth General Council of Lateran renewed this canon, hurling excommunication against all who should disregard it, but graciously permitting the clergy to aid in the exigencies of the State if they saw fit and the Pope were willing. Here was "a kingdom of priests," the owners of half the soil, every inch of which was enclosed within a sacred rail, so that no one durst lay a finger upon it, unless indeed their foreign head, the Pontiff, should first give his consent.

In these overgrown riches Wyckliffe discerned the source of innumerable evils. The nation was being beggared and the Government was being weakened. The lands of the Church were continually growing wider, and the area which supported the burdens of the State and furnished the revenues of the Crown was constantly growing narrower. Nor was the possession of this wealth less hurtful to the corporation that owned it, than its abstraction was to that from whom it had been torn. Whence flowed the many corruptions of the Church, the pride, the luxury, the indolence of Churchmen? "Prelates and priests," says Wyckliffe, "cry aloud and write that the king hath no jurisdiction or power over the persons and goods of Holy Church. And when the king and the secular Lords, perceiving that their ancestors' alms are wasted in pomp and pride, gluttony and other vanities, wish to take again the superfluity of temporal goods, and to help the land and themselves and their tenants, these worldly clerks bawl loudly that they ought to be cursed for intrmitting with the goods of Holy Church, as if secular Lords and Commons were no part of Holy Church."

He proposed, and not only did he propose, he earnestly pleaded with the king and

Parliament, that the whole ecclesiastical estate should be reformed in accordance with the principles he had enunciated. Let the Church surrender all her possessions — her broad acres, her palatial building, her tithes, her multiform dues — and return to the simplicity of her early days, and depend only on the free-will offerings of the people, as did the Apostles and first preachers of the gospel. Such was the plan Wyckliffe laid before the men of the fourteenth century. We may well imagine the amazement with which he was listened to.

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

It may perhaps be objected that thus to deprive the Church of her property was to injure vitally the interests of religion and civilization. With the abstract question we have here nothing to do; let us look at the matter practically, and as it must have presented itself to Wyckliffe. The withdrawal of the Church's property from the service of religion was already all but complete. So far as concerned the religious instruction and the spiritual interests of the nation, this wealth profited about as little as if it did not exist at all. It served but to maintain the pomps of the higher clergy, and the excesses which reigned in the religious houses. The question then, practically, was not, Shall this property be withdrawn from religious uses? but, Shall it be withdrawn from its actual uses, which certainly are not religious, and be devoted to other objects more profitable to the commonwealth?

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

And what a fine logical sequence is seen running through the process of the emancipation of the country! The first step was to cast off its political vassalage to the Papal chair; the second was to vindicate the independence of its Church against her who haughtily styles

herself the "Mother and Mistress of all Churches;" the third was to make good the sole and unchallenged use of its own property, by forbidding the gold of the nation to be carried across the sea for the use of the country's foes. And now another step forward is taken. A proposal is heard to abate the power of superstition within the realm, by curtailing its overgrown resources, heedless of the cry of sacrilege, the only weapon by which the Church attempted to protect the wealth that had been acquired by means not the most honorable, and which was now devoted to ends not the most useful. England is the first of the European communities to flee from that prison-house in which the Crowned Priest of the Seven Hills had shut up the nations.

While Wyckliffe was struggling to break first of all his own fetters, and next the fetters of an enslaved nation, God was working in the high places of the earth for his preservation. Every day the number of his enemies increased. The shield of John of Gaunt no longer covered his head. Soon not a friend would there be by his side, and he would be left naked and defenseless to the rage of his foes. But He who said to the patriarch of old, "Fear not, I am thy shield," protected his own chosen champion. Wyckliffe had offered inexpressible affront to Gregory; he had plucked England as a prey out of his very teeth; he had driven away his taxgatherers, who continually hovered like a flock of cormorants round the land. But not content with clipping the talons of the Papacy and checking her rapacity in time to come, he was even now meditating how he might make her reckon for the past, and disgorge the wealth which by so many and so questionable means she had already devoured, and send forth abbot and monk as poor as were the apostles and first preachers. This was not to be borne. For a hundredth part of this, how many men had ere this done expiation in the fire! No wonder that Wyckliffe was marked out as the man to be struck down. Three bulls did Gregory dispatch with this object. The university, the hierarchy, the king: on all were the Pontifical commands laid to arrest and imprison the heretic — the short road to the stake. Wyckliffe was as good as dead; so doubtless was it thought at Avignon. Death was about to strike, but it was on Gregory XI that the blow was destined to fall. Instead of a stake at Oxford, there was a bier at the Vatican. The Pope a little while before had returned to Rome, so terminating the "Babylonish captivity;" but he had returned only to die (1378). But death struck a second time: there was a bier at Westminster as well as at the Vatican. When Courtenay, Bishop of London, was about to summon Wyckliffe to his bar, Edward III, whose senility the bishop was likely to take advantage of against the Reformer, died also, and John of Gaunt became regent of the kingdom. So now, when the Papal toils were closing around Wyckliffe, death suddenly stiffened the hand that had woven them, and the commission of delegates which the now defunct Gregory had appointed to try, and which he had commanded to condemn the Reformer, was dissolved.

In another way did the death of the Pope give a breathing-time to the Reformer and the young Reformation of England. On the 7th of April, 1378, the cardinals assembled in the Quirinal to elect a successor to Gregory. The majority of the sacred college being Frenchmen, the Roman populace, fearing that they would place one of their own nation in the vacant chair, and that the Pontifical court would again retire to Avignon, gathered round the palace where the cardinals were met, and with loud tumult and terrible threats demanded a Roman for their Pope. Not a cardinal should leave the hall alive, so did the

rioters threaten, unless their request was complied with. An Italian, the Archbishop of Bari, was chosen; the mob was soothed, and instead of stoning the cardinals it saluted them with "Vivas." But the new Pope was austere, penurious, tyrannical, and selfish; the cardinals soon became disgusted, and escaping from Rome they met and chose a Frenchman — Robert, Bishop of Geneva — for the tiara, declaring the former election null on the plea that the choice had been made under compulsion. Thus was created the famous schism in the Papal chair which for a full half-century divided and scandalized the Papal world.

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

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

It was now that the Reformer opened the second part of his great career. Hitherto his efforts had been mainly directed to breaking the political fetters in which the Papacy had bound his countrymen. But stronger fetters held fast their souls. These his countrymen needed more to have rent, though perhaps they galled them less, and to this higher object the Reformer now exclusively devoted what of life and strength remained to him. In this instance, too, his own fuller emancipation preceded that of his countrymen. The "schism," with the scandals and crimes that flowed from it, helped to reveal to him yet more clearly the true character of the Papacy. He published a tract *On the Schism of the Popes*, in which he appealed to the nation whether those men who were denouncing each

other as the Antichrist were not, in this case, speaking the truth, and whether the present was not an opportunity given them by Providence for grasping those political weapons which He had wrested from the hands of the hierarchy, and using them in the destruction of those oppressive and iniquitous laws and customs under which England had so long groaned. "The fiend," he said, "no longer reigns in one but in two priests, that men may the more easily, in Christ's name, overcome them both."

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

Wyckliffe was now getting old, but the Reformer was worn out rather by the harassing attacks of his foes, and his incessant and ever-growing labors, than with the weight of years, for he was not yet sixty. He fell sick. With unbounded joy the friars heard that their great enemy was dying. Of course he was overwhelmed with horror and remorse for the evil he had done them, and they would hasten to his bedside and receive the expression of his penitence and sorrow. In a trice a little crowd of shaven crowns assembled round the couch of the sick man — delegates from the four orders of friars. "They began fair," wishing him "health and restoration from his, distemper;" but speedily changing their tone, they exhorted him, as one on the brink of the grave, to make full confession, and express his unfeigned grief for the injuries he had inflicted on their order. Wyckliffe lay silent till they should have made an end, then, making his servant raise him a little on his pillow, and fixing his keen eyes upon them, he said with a loud voice, "I shall not die, but live and declare the evil deeds of the friars." The monks rushed in astonishment and confusion from the chamber. As Wyckliffe had foretold so it came to pass. His sickness left him, and he rose from his bed to do the most daring of his impieties as his enemies accounted it, the most glorious of his services as the friends of humanity will ever esteem it. The work of which so very different estimates have been formed, was that of giving the Bible to the people of England in their own tongue.

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

Wyckliffe's idea was to give the whole Bible in the vernacular to the people of England, so that every man in the realm might read in the tongue wherein he was born the wonderful works of God. No one in England had thought of such a thing before. As one who turns away from the sun to guide his steps by the light of a taper, so did the men of those days turn to tradition, to the scholastic philosophy, to Papal infallibility; but the

more they followed these guides, the farther they strayed from the true path. God was in the world; the Divine Light was in the pavilion of the Word, but no one thought of drawing aside the curtain and letting that light shine upon the path of men. This was the achievement Wyckliffe now set himself to do. If he could accomplish this he would do more to place the liberties of England on an immutable foundation, and to raise his country to greatness, than would a hundred brilliant victories.

He had not, however, many years in which to do his great work. There remained only the portion of a decade of broken health. But his intellectual rigor was unimpaired, his experience and graces were at their ripest. What had the whole of his past life been but a preparation for what was to be the glorious task of his evening? He was a good Latin scholar. He set himself down in his quiet Rectory of Lutterworth. He opened the Vulgate Scriptures, that book which all his life he had studied, and portions of which he had already translated. The world around him was shaken with convulsions; two Popes were hurling their anathemas at one another. Wyckliffe pursued his sublime work undisturbed by the roar of the tempest.

Day by day he did his self-appointed task. As verse after verse was rendered into the English tongue, the Reformer had the consolation of thinking that another ray had been shot into the darkness which brooded over his native land, that another bolt had been forged to rend the shackles which bound the souls of his countrymen. In four years from beginning his task, the Reformer had completed it. The message of Heaven was now in the speech of England. The dawn of the Reformation had fairly broken. Wyckliffe had assistance in his great work. The whole of the New Testament was translated by himself; but Dr. Nicholas de Hereford, of Oxford, is supposed to have been the translator of the Old Testament, which, however, was partly revised by Wyckliffe. This version is remarkably truthful and spirited. The antique Saxon gives a dramatic air to some passages. Wyckliffe's version of the Bible rendered other services than the religious one, though that was pre-eminent and paramount. It powerfully contributed to form the English tongue, in the way of perfecting its structure and enlarging its vocabulary. The sublimity and purity of the doctrines reacted on the language into which they were rendered, communicating to it a simplicity, a beauty, a pathos, a precision, and a force unknown to it till then. Wyckliffe has been called the Father of English Prose, as Chaucer is styled the Father of English Poetry.

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

When the work of translating was ended, the nearly as difficult work of publishing began.

The interest taken in the man and in his work enlisted a hundred expert hands, who, though they toiled to multiply copies, could scarcely supply the many who were eager to buy. Some ordered complete copies to be made for them; others were content with portions; the same copy served several families in many instances, and in a very short time Wyckliffe's English Bible had obtained a wide circulation, and brought a new life into many an English home.

As when the day opens on some weary traveler who, all night long, has been groping his way amid thickets and quagmires, so was it with those of the English people who read the Word of Life now presented to them in their mother-tongue.

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

In short, a great clamor was raised against the Reformer by the priests and their followers, unhappily the bulk of the nation. He was a heretic, a sacrilegious man; he had committed a crime unknown to former ages; he had broken into the temple and stolen the sacred vessels; he had fired the House of God. Such were the terms in which the man was spoken of, who had given to his country the greatest boon England ever received. Wyckliffe had to fight the battle alone. No peer or great man stood by his side. It would seem as if there must come, in the career of all great reformers — and Wyckliffe stands in the first rank — a moment when, forsaken of all, and painfully sensible of their isolation, they must display the perfection and sublimity of faith by leaning only on One, even God.

Such a moment had come to the Reformer of the fourteenth century. Wyckliffe stood alone in the storm. But he was tranquil; he looked his raging foes calmly in the face. He retorted on them the charges they had hurled against him. You say, said he, that "it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English." You call me a heretic because I have translated the Bible into the common tongue of the people. Do you know whom you blaspheme? Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother-tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed? Why do you speak against the Holy Ghost? You say that the Church of God is in danger from this book. How can that be? Is it not from the Bible only that we learn that God has set up such a society as a Church on the earth?

Is it not the Bible that gives all her authority to the Church? Is it not from the Bible that we learn who is the Builder and Sovereign of the Church, what are the laws by which she is to be governed, and the rights and privileges of her members? Without the Bible, what charter has the Church to show for all these? It is you who place the Church in jeopardy by hiding the Divine warrant, the missive royal of her King, for the authority she wields and the faith she enjoins. The circulation of the Scriptures had arrayed the Protestant movement in the panoply of light.

Did the Reformer now rest? He was old and sickly, and needed repose. His day had been a stormy one; sweet it were at its even-tide to taste a little quiet. But no. He had just ended one battle, he now girded himself for another. He turned to attack the doctrinal system of the Church of Rome.

He had come ere this to be of opinion that the system of Rome's doctrines, and the ceremonies of her worship, were anti-Christian –

a "new religion, founded of sinful men," and opposed to "the rule of Jesus Christ given by Him to His Apostles;"

but in beginning this new battle he selected one particular dogma, as the object of attack. That dogma was Transubstantiation. It is here that the superstition of Rome culminates: it is in this more than in any other dogma that we find the sources of her prodigious authority, and the springs of her vast influence. In making his blow to fall here, Wyckliffe knew that the stroke would have ten-fold more effect than if directed against a less vital part of the system. If he could abolish the sacrifice of the priest, he would bring back the sacrifice of Christ, which alone is the Gospel, because through it is the "remission of sins," and the "life everlasting."

Transubstantiation was invented by the monk Paschasius Radbertus in the ninth century; it came into England in the train of William the Conqueror and his Anglo-Norman priests; it was zealously preached by Lanfranc, a Benedictine monk and Abbot of St. Stephen of Caen in Normandy, who was raised to the See of Canterbury under William; and from the time of Lanfranc to the days of Wyckliffe this error was received by the Anglo-Norman clergy of England. It was hardly to be expected that they would very narrowly or critically examine the foundations of a doctrine which contributed so greatly to their power; and as regards the laity of those days, it was enough for them if they had the word of the Church that this doctrine was true.

In the spring of 1381, Wyckliffe posted up at Oxford twelve propositions denying the dogma of transubstantiation, and challenging all of the contrary opinion to debate the matter with him. The first of these propositions was as follows: –

"The consecrated Host, which we see upon the altar, is neither Christ nor any part of Him, but an efficacious sign of Him."

He admitted that the words of consecration invest the elements with a mysterious and venerable character, but that they do in nowise change their substance. The bread and wine are as really bread and wine after as before their consecration. Christ, he goes on to reason, called the elements "bread" and "My body;" they were "bread" and they were Christ's "body," as He Himself is very man and very God, without any commingling of the two natures; so the elements are "bread" and "Christ's body" – "bread" really, and "Christ's body" figuratively and spiritually. Such, in brief, is what Wyckliffe avowed as his opinion on the Eucharist at the commencement of the controversy, and on this ground he continued to stand all throughout it.

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

The council, summoned in haste, met, it would seem, in comparative secrecy, for Wyckliffe knew nothing of what was going on. He was in his classroom, expounding to his students the true nature of the Eucharist, when the door opened, and a delegate from the council made his appearance in the hall. He held in his hand the sentence of the doctors, which he proceeded to read. It enjoined silence on Wyckliffe as regarded his opinions on transubstantiation, under pain of imprisonment, suspension from all scholastic functions, and the greater excommunication. This was tantamount to his expulsion from the university. "But," interposed Wyckliffe, "you ought first to have shown me that I am in error." The only response was to be reminded of the sentence of the court, to which, he was told, he must submit himself, or take the penalty. "Then," said Wyckliffe, "I appeal to the king and the Parliament."

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

New and unexpected clouds now gathered in the sky. Before Wyckliffe could prosecute

his appeal in Parliament, an insurrection broke out in England. The causes and the issues of that insurrection do not here concern us, farther than as they bore on the fate of the Reformer. Wat Tyler, and a priest of the name of John Ball, traversed England, rousing the passions of the populace with fiery harangues preached from the text they had written upon their banners: –

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

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

But in one way these events did connect themselves with the Reformer. The mob apprehended Sudbury the primate, and beheaded him. Courtenay, the bitter enemy of Wyckliffe, was installed in the vacant see. And now we look for more decisive measures against him. Yet God, by what seemed an oversight at Rome, shielded the venerable Reformer. The bull appointing Courtenay to the primacy arrived, but the pall did not come with it. The pall, it is well known, is the most essential of all those badges and insignia by which the Pope conveys to bishops the authority to act under him. Courtenay was too obedient a son of the Pope knowingly to transgress one of the least of his father's commandments. He burned with impatience to strike the head of heresy in England, but his scrupulous conscience would not permit him to proceed even against Wyckliffe till the pall had given him full investiture with office. Hence the refreshing quiet and spiritual solace which the Reformer continued to enjoy at his country rectory. It was now that Wyckliffe shot another bolt – the Wicket.

At last the pall arrived. The primate, in possession of the mysterious and potent symbol, could now exercise the full powers of his great office. He immediately convoked a synod to try the Rector of Lutterworth. The court met on the 17th of May, 1382, in a place of evil augury – when we take into account with whom Wyckliffe's life-battle had been waged – the Monastery of Blackfriars, London. The judges were assembled, including eight prelates, fourteen doctors of the canon and of the civil law, six bachelors of divinity, four monks, and fifteen Mendicant friars. They had taken their seats, and were proceeding to business, when an ominous sound filled the air, and the building in which they were assembled began to rock. The monastery and all the city of London were shaken by an earthquake.

Startled and terrified, the members of the court, turning to the president, demanded an adjournment. It did seem as if "the stars in their courses" were fighting against the primate. On the first occasion on which he summoned Wyckliffe before him, the

populace forced their way into the hall, and the court broke up in confusion. The same thing happened over again on the second occasion on which Wyckliffe came to his bar; a popular tempest broke over the court, and the judges were driven from the judgment-seat. A third time Wyckliffe is summoned, and the court meets in a place where it was easier to take precautions against interference from the populace, when lo! the ground is suddenly rocked by an earthquake. But Courtenay had now got his pall from Rome, and was above these weak fears. So turning to his brother judges, he delivered to them a short homily on the earthly uses and mystic meanings of earthquakes, and bade them be of good courage and go on.

An officer of the court read out twenty-six propositions selected from the writings of the Reformer. The court sat three days in "good deliberation" over them. It unanimously condemned ten of them as heretical, and the remainder as erroneous. Among those specially branded as heresies, were the propositions relating to transubstantiation, the temporal emoluments of the hierarchy, and the supremacy of the Pope.

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

The Reformation was advancing, but it appeared at this moment as if the Reformer was on the eve of being crushed. He had many friends – every day was adding to their number – but they lacked courage, and remained in the background. His lectures at Oxford had planted the gospel in the schools, the Bible which he had translated was planting it in the homes of England. But if the disciples of the Reformation multiplied, so too did the foes of the Reformer. The hierarchy had all along withstood and persecuted him, now the mailed hand of the king was raised to strike him. When this was seen, all his friends fell away from him. John of Gaunt had deserted him at an earlier stage. This prince stood stoutly by Wyckliffe so long as the Reformer occupied himself in simply repelling encroachments of the hierarchy upon the prerogatives of the crown and independence of the nation. That was a branch of the controversy the duke could understand. But when it passed into the doctrinal sphere, when the bold Reformer, not content with cropping off a few excrescences, began to lay the axe to the root – to deny the Sacrament and abolish the altar – the valiant prince was alarmed; he felt that he had stepped on ground which he did not know, and that he was in danger of being drawn into a bottomless pit of heresy. John of Gaunt, therefore, made all haste to draw off. But others too, of whom better

things might have been expected, quailed before the gathering storm, and stood aloof from the Reformer. Dr. Nicholas Hereford, who had aided him in translating the Old Testament, and John Ashton, the most eloquent of those preachers whom Wyckliffe had sent forth to traverse England, consulted their own safety rather than the defense of their leader, and the honor of the cause they had espoused. This conduct doubtless grieved, but did not dismay Wyckliffe. Not an iota of heart or hope did he abate therefore. Nay, he chose this moment to make a forward movement, and to aim more terrible blows at the Papacy than any he had yet dealt it.

The Parliament met on the 19th November, 1382. Wyckliffe could now prosecute his appeal to the king against the sentence of the university court, condemning his twelve propositions. But the prelates had been beforehand with him. They had inveigled the sovereign into lending them the sword of the State to wield at will against Wyckliffe, and against all who should doubt the tremendous mystery of transubstantiation. Well, they might burn him tomorrow, but he lived today, and the doors of Parliament stood open. Wyckliffe made haste to enter with his appeal and complaint. The hierarchy had secretly accused him to the king, he openly arraigns them before the Estates of the Realm.

The complaint presented by Wyckliffe touched on four heads, and on each it demanded a very sweeping measure of reform. The first grievance to be abated or abolished was the monastic orders. The Reformer demanded that they should be released from the unnatural and immoral vow which made them the scandal of the Church, and the pests of society.

The second part of the complaint had reference to the temporalities of the Church. The corruption and inefficiency of the clergy, Wyckliffe traced largely to their enormous wealth. That the clergy themselves would surrender these overgrown revenues he did not expect; he called, therefore, for the interference of the State, holding, despite the opposite doctrine promulgated by the priests, that both the property and persons of the priesthood were under the jurisdiction of the king. "Magistracy," he affirms, is "God's ordinance;" and he remarks that the Apostle Paul, "who putteth all men in subjection to kings, taketh out never a one." And analogous to this was the third part of the paper, which related to tithes and offerings. Let these, said Wyckliffe, be remodeled. Let tithes and offerings be on a scale which shall be amply sufficient for the support of the recipients in the discharge of their sacred duties, but not such as to minister to their luxury and pride; and if a priest shall be found to be indolent or vicious, let neither tithe nor offering be given him.

The last part of the paper went deeper. It touched on doctrine, and on that doctrine which occupies a central place in the Romish system – transubstantiation. His own views on the dogma he did not particularly define in this appeal to Parliament, though he did so a little while before the Convocation; he contented himself with craving liberty to have the true doctrine of the Eucharist, as given by Christ and His Apostles, taught throughout England.

The enemies of the Reformer must have been confounded by this bold attack. They had persuaded themselves that the hour was come when Wyckliffe must yield. Hereford,

Repingdon, Ashton – all his friends, one after the other, had reconciled themselves to the hierarchy. The priests waited to see Wyckliffe come forward, last of all, and bow his majestic head, and then they would lead him about in chains as a trophy of their victory, and a proof of the complete suppression of the movement of Reform. He comes forward, but not to retract, not even to apologize, but with heart which grows only the stouter as his years increase and his enemies multiply, to reiterate his charges and again to proclaim in the face of the whole nation the corruption, tyranny, and errors of the hierarchy. His sentiments found an echo in the Commons, and Parliament repealed the persecuting edict which the priests and the king had surreptitiously passed. Thus the gain remained with Wyckliffe

Baffled before the Parliament, the primate turned to Convocation. The scene where the trial took place must have recalled many memories to Wyckliffe which could not but deeply stir him. It was now forty years since he had entered Oxford as a scholar; these halls had witnessed the toils of his youth and the labors of his manhood. Here had the most brilliant of his achievements been performed; here had his name been mentioned with honor, and his renown as a man of erudition and genius formed not the least constituent in the glory of his university. But this day Oxford opened her venerable gates to receive him in a new character. He came to be tried, perchance to be condemned; and, if his judges were able, to be delivered over to the civil power and punished as a heretic. The issue of the affair might be that that same Oxford which had borrowed a luster from his name would be lit up with the flames of his martyrdom. The indictment turned specially upon transubstantiation. Did he affirm or deny that cardinal doctrine of the Church? The Reformer raised his venerable head in presence of the vast assembly; his eyes sought out Courtenay, the archbishop, on whom he fixed a steady and searching gaze, and proceeded. In this, his last address before any court, he retracts nothing; he modifies nothing; he reiterates and confirms the whole teaching of his life on the question of the Eucharist.

Wyckliffe must bear testimony at Rome also. It was Pope Urban, not knowing what he did, who arranged that the voice of this great witness, before becoming finally silent, should be heard speaking from the Seven Hills. One day about this time, as he was toiling with his pen in his quiet rectory — for his activity increased as his infirmities multiplied, and the night drew on in which he could not work — he received a summons from the Pontiff to repair to Rome, and answer for his heresy before the Papal See. He had had a shock of palsy, and, had he attempted a journey so toilsome, would have died on the way long before he could have reached the gates of the Pontifical city. But though he could not go to Rome in person, he could go by letter, and thus the ends of Providence, if not the ends of Urban, would be equally served. The Pontiff and his conclave and, in short, all Christendom were to have another warning — another call to repentance — addressed to them before the Reformer should descend into the tomb.

John Wyckliffe sat down in his rectory to speak, across intervening mountains and seas, to Urban of Rome. Than the epistle of the Rector of Lutterworth to the Pontiff of Christendom nothing can be imagined keener in its satire, yet nothing could have been more Christian and faithful in its spirit. Assuming Urban to be what Urban held himself

to be, Wyckliffe went on to say that there was no one before whom he could so joyfully appear as before Christ's Vicar, for by no one could he expect Christ's law to be more revered, or Christ's gospel more loved. At no tribunal could he expect greater equity than that before which he now stood, and therefore if he had strayed from the gospel, he was sure here to have his error proved to him, and the path of truth pointed out. The Vicar of Christ, he quietly assumes, does not affect the greatness of this world; oh, no; he leaves its pomps and vanities to worldly men, and contenting himself with the lowly estate of Him who while on earth had not where to lay His head, he seeks no glory save the glory of resembling his Master. The "worldly lordship" he is compelled to bear is, he is sure, an unwelcome burden, of which he is fain to be rid. The Holy Father ceases not, doubtless, to exhort all his priests throughout Christendom to follow herein his own example, and to feed with the Bread of Life the flocks committed to their care. The Reformer closes by reiterating his willingness, if in aught he had erred, "to be meekly amended, if needs be, by death."

Thus were they condemned: but it was Christ who had condemned them. This was all that Urban had gained by summoning Wyckliffe before him. He had but erected a pulpit on the Seven Hills, from the lofty elevation of which the English Reformer was able to proclaim, in the hearing of all the nations of Europe, that Rome was the Antichrist.

On the last Sunday of the year 1384, he was to have dispensed the Eucharist to his beloved flock in the parish church of Lutterworth; and as he was in the act of consecrating the bread and wine, he was struck with palsy, and fell on the pavement. This was the third attack of the malady. He was affectionately borne to the rectory, laid on his bed, and died on the 31st of December, his life and the year closing together.

If we can speak of one center where the light which is spreading over the earth, and which is destined one day to illuminate it all, originally arose, that center is England. And if to one man the honor of beginning that movement which is renewing the world can be ascribed beyond controversy, that man is John Wyckliffe.

With all the early Fathers he gave prominence to the free grace of God in the matter of man's salvation; in fact, he ascribed it entirely to grace. He taught the eternal Godhead of Christ — very God and very man; His substitution in the room of the guilty; His work of obedience; His sacrifice upon the cross, and the free justification of the sinner through faith in that sacrifice. "Here we must know," says he, "the story of the old law... As a right looking on that adder of brass saved the people from the venom of serpents, so a right looking by full belief on Christ saveth His people. Christ died not for His own sins as thieves do for theirs, but as our Brother, who Himself might not sin, He died for the sins that others had done." What Wyckliffe did in the field of theology was not to compile a system, but to give a plain exposition of scripture; to restore to the eyes of men, from whom they had long been hidden, those truths which are for the healing of their souls. He left it for those who should come after him to formulate the doctrines which he deduced from the inspired page.

The early models of Church government and order Wyckliffe also dug up from underneath the rubbish of thirteen centuries. He maintained that the Church was made up of the whole body of the faithful; he discarded the idea that the clergy alone are the Church; the laity, he held, are equally an essential part of it; nor ought there to be, he held, among its ministers, gradation of rank or official pre-eminence. The indolence, pride, and dissensions which reigned among the clergy of his day, he viewed as arising from violation of the law of the gospel, which declares "it were better for the clerks to be all of one estate." "From the faith of the Scriptures," says he in his *Triialogus*, "it seems to me to be sufficient that there should be presbyters and deacons holding that state and office which Christ has imposed on them, since it appears certain that these degrees and orders have their origin in the pride of Caesar." And again he observes, "I boldly assert one thing, namely, that in the primitive Church, or in the time of Paul, two orders of the clergy were sufficient — that is, a priest and a deacon. In like manner I affirm that in the time of Paul, the presbyter and bishop were names of the same office. This appears from the third chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy, and in the first chapter of the Epistle to Titus."

Before Wyckliffe could form these opinions he had to forget the age in which he lived, and place himself in the midst of Apostolic times; he had to emancipate himself from the prestige which a venerable antiquity gave to the institutions around him, and seek his model and principles in the Word of God. It was an act of stupendous obedience done in faith, but by that act he became the pioneer of the Reformation, and the father of all those, in any age or country, who confess that, in their efforts after Reformation, they seek a "City" which hath its "foundations" in the teachings of prophets and apostles, and whose "Builder and Maker" is the Spirit of God. "That whole circle of questions," says Dr. Hanna, "concerning the canon of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and the right of private interpretation of Scripture, with which the later controversies of the Reformation have made us so familiar, received their first treatment in this country at Wyckliffe's hands. In conducting this fundamental controversy, Wyckliffe had to lay all the foundations with his own unaided hand."

In the collective history of the Church of Christ Wyckliffe makes an epoch, in so far as he is the first reforming personality. Before him arose, it is true, here and there many schemes and active endeavors, which led also to dissensions and collisions, and ultimately to the formation of separate communities; but Wyckliffe is the first important personality who devoted himself to the work of Church reform with the whole bent of his mind, with all the thinking power of a superior intellect, and the full force of will and joyful self-devotion of a man in Christ Jesus. Wyckliffe, had he lived two centuries later, would very probably have been to England what Luther was to Germany, and Knox to Scotland. His appearance in the fourteenth century enabled him to discharge an office that in some respects was higher, and to fill a position that is altogether unique in the religious history of Christendom. With Wyckliffe the world changes from stagnancy to progress. He was the morning-star of the Reformation of Christendom.

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CHAPTER 18 : WYCKLIFFE, MORNINGSTAR OF THE REFORMATION

This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

James A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (Cassell & Company, Limited: London, Paris & New York. 1878). (see electronic version at <http://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Fellowship/James.A.Wylie.html>)

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J. Parnell McCarter, *Sabbath Bible Survey Tests and Assignments* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/>)

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.