

THE PRE-REFORMATION INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE IN ENGLAND  
A Study of the Mediaeval Period to the Time of Wyclif

by

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A Study of the Mediaeval Period to the Time of Wyclif.

INTRODUCTION.

1. STATEMENT AND DELIMITATION OF THE SUBJECT.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to give a detailed account of the texts and translations of the Bible, nor the biography of any one individual. It will be shown, however, that from an early period in the history of England there was considerable acquaintance with the Scriptures, and that a long time before the Reformation this acquaintance with the Bible was preparing the people for the break with Rome, by revealing how far the Church had fallen in practice and doctrine from its original sources. There were doubtless many other forces working toward the Reformation, which do not come within the scope of this theses, and which, therefore, if mentioned at all will be mentioned only incidentally in the effort to show the part played by acquaintance with the Bible. The period under consideration extends from the landing of Augustine in England in 597 to and including the work of John Wyclif who died in 1384.

2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT.

a. PERTINENCE.

The Reformation in England did not come suddenly. It was not merely the result of a sudden and superficial turn of events. There was strong, deep movement in the direction of reform long

before it expressed itself in definite political and ecclesiastical changes. Over a hundred years before the Reformation, Wyclif was striving with all his might to bring it about, and even prophesied its coming. He wrote, "And soone after this lyfe shal come the daie of dome, but bifore, if God wole, the Chirche shal be mendid".<sup>1</sup> Justification for the subject of this thesis is found in the light which a study of the subject throws on the great importance and necessity of knowledge of the Bible for keeping the Church, in any age, true to its sources and to the spirit of its Founder.

b. POSSIBILITY.

In spite of the fact that many of the earlier records were destroyed at the time of the invasion of the Danes, there is quite a wealth of source material bearing on the subject. To mention a few, the Venerable Bede's historical works such as the "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation", and the "History of the Abbots", and also his letters, and the letters and writings of Alcuin not only contain frequent Scripture references themselves but bear testimony to the fact that the Bible was known and studied long before it was translated as a whole into English. Quotations from Bede's works are from Dr. J.A.Giles' edition in six volumes of the "Complete Works of Venerable Bede", containing the Latin text and an English translation on opposite pages. Extant manuscripts of early Anglo-Saxon metric paraphrases and fragmentary translations, and also the works of King Alfred, show that there was acquaintance with the Bible in England during the early part of the Middle Ages.

1. Arnold, Select English Works of John Wyclif, Sermon XLII, I, 119

For the later part of our study there is an even greater wealth of source material, but on account of the limits of this paper and the very important part played by Wyclif in the preparation for the Reformation, this thesis will confine itself very largely to a consideration of his voluminous writings, and the light which they throw on the pre-Reformation influence of the Bible. Reference will be made later to the editions of his works from which quotations have been made.

### 3. METHOD.

The method to be followed has already been partially indicated in discussing the source materials. The fact that an early period of cultural enlightenment and acquaintance with the Bible was eclipsed by the invasion of the Danes suggests the division of the earlier period into two main divisions. This has been done even though the material under each section is very largely treated topically rather than in strict or detailed historical outline. As acquaintance with the Bible during this early period is only remotely connected with the Reformation, its discussion will be cursory and introductory to the main task of this thesis, namely a study of the writings, controversies, and teachings of John Wyclif, giving particular attention to the part that acquaintance with Scripture had in preparing for the Reformation.

PART ONE. THE EARLY PERIOD.

I. CONTINUITY OF ACQUAINTANCE INTERRUPTED BY THE  
INVASION OF THE DANES.

1. INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

Christianity had been introduced into Roman Britain before the barbarian invasions. But when St. Augustine landed in Kent in 597, he found the Southeastern portions of the Island occupied by pagan Saxons and Angles who had driven the Britons toward the West and North. The Britons though remaining Christian and under the influence of the Irish Church, had made no effort to evangelize their heathen neighbors, with whom they had no dealings except those of warfare. The Irish Church had great missionary zeal, however, and continued to send missionaries to different parts of the island even after the Roman missionaries had begun to Christianize the heathen Saxons. 1.

The Irish and Roman Churches remained separate until the Council of Whitby in 664, differing as to the proper date for observing Easter, but both were strongly Scriptural. The Irish Church especially had a reputation in that respect. "The learning of the Irish was wholly in psalm singing and theology, not in the classics, and the *majora studia* meant the Scriptures, and not philosophy or literature".<sup>2</sup> Bede says, "It is true they followed uncertain rules in their observance of the great festival, as having none to bring them the synodal decrees for the observance of Easter, by reason of their being so far away from the rest of the world; wherefore they only practised such works of piety and

1. Cf. Giles, Complete Works of Venerable Bede. II, 269, 271.

2. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 48.

chastity as they could learn from the prophetic, evangelical, and apostolic writings."<sup>1</sup> It is also mentioned that there came "out of Ireland, a certain bishop called Agilbert, by nation a Frenchman, but who had then lived a long time in Ireland, for the purpose of reading the Scriptures"<sup>2</sup> He later returned to his own country and became bishop of Paris. Bede also records that the great Irish missionary Columba's mission to the Picts was "to preach the word of God".<sup>3</sup> There is a description of Bishop Aidan which illustrates the prominence of Scripture in the teaching of the Irish missionaries. Aidan came from Ireland in 635 at the request of King Oswald who gave him the see of Lindisfarne.<sup>4</sup> "His course of life was so different from the slothfulness of our times, that all those who bore him company, whether they were shorn monks or laymen, were employed in meditation, that is, either in reading the Scriptures, or learning psalms."<sup>5</sup>

Not only the Irish missionaries but also those from Rome seem to have been well acquainted with Scripture, and were expected to be so by those that sent them. Pope Gregory, writing to Augustine upon some matter, based his argument upon "Holy Writ, which no doubt you are well versed in".<sup>6</sup> Also Hadrian and Theodore, who came from Rome about 669, were great Bible scholars and teachers. "And forasmuch as both of them were as has been said before, well read both in sacred and secular

1. Giles, Bede, II, 275
2. Ibid. II, 285.
3. Ibid. II, 271.
4. Cf. Ibid. II, 269.
5. Ibid. II, 277.
6. Ibid. II, 107.

literature, they gathered a crowd of disciples, and there daily flowed from them rivers of knowledge to water the hearts of their hearers; and, together with the books of holy writ, they also taught them the arts of ecclesiastical poetry, astronomy, and arithmetic. --- and all who desired to be instructed in sacred reading, had masters at hand to instruct them".<sup>1</sup>

## 2. PREACHING.

The importance of preaching as a means of spreading Bible knowledge cannot be overemphasised. In the later Middle Ages its general neglect on the part of the clergy was one of the abuses strongly attacked by Wyclif, but in the earlier period preaching was much used and was an effective means of presenting the Gospel to the common people who, due to the general ignorance of Latin, were able to learn only by hearing. Abbot Aelfric of Ensham at the close of the tenth century instructed in his canons that "The mass-priest shall on Sundays and mass days tell to the people the sense of the Gospel in English and so too of the Pater Noster and the Creed. Blind is the teacher if he know not book-learning."<sup>2</sup> None were more aware than the Venerable Bede himself of the importance of preaching and teaching the Bible in English and the necessity of the common man's understanding the content of his faith. Writing to Bishop Egbert he said, "occupy your tongue and mind with divine preachings and meditations on Scripture, and particularly in reading the epistles of the Apostle St. Paul to Timothy and Titus".<sup>3</sup> "For read the Acts of the Apostles, and you will see

1. Giles, Bede. III, 11 & 13.

2. Hoare, The Evolution of the English Bible, 31.

3. Giles, Bede, I, 111.

by the narrative of Saint Luke, what companions Paul and Barnabas had with them, and what works they themselves wrought, wherever they went. For as soon as they entered a city or a synagogue, they sought to preach the word of God, and to disseminate it on every side. This, I would wish you also, beloved friend, to make your aim; for to this duty were you elected, to this you were consecrated, and with great virtues you should preach the Gospel, by the aid of him who is the Prince of all virtue, Jesus Christ our Lord".<sup>1</sup> "I consider it above every other thing important, that you should endeavour to implant deeply in the memory of all men the Catholic faith which is contained in the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer as it is taught us in the Holy Gospel. And, indeed, there is no doubt, that those who have studied the Latin language will be found to know these well; but the vulgar, that is, those who know only their own language, must be made to say them and repeat them over and over again in their own tongue. This must be done not only in the case of laymen, who are still in the life of the world, but with the clergy or monks, who are without a knowledge of the Latin tongue. --- Wherefore also, I have myself often given English translations of both these, namely, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer to uneducated priests".<sup>2</sup> "But those also, who still live abroad in the world, demand a portion of your most anxious care, --- you should furnish them with competent teachers of the word of everlasting life".<sup>3</sup>

1. Giles, Bede, I, 113, 115.

2. Ibid. I, 115, 117.

3. Ibid. I, 135.

Preaching was of particular importance during the missionary period, when there were still hordes of barbarians to be converted and the fate of Christianity still hung in the balance. Ealdhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury, not satisfied with the number of those who came to hear him preach, took his stand at a bridge, and having gathered a crowd by singing West-Saxon songs to the people as they passed on their way to market, he proceeded to preach the Gospel to them.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. METRIC PARAPHRASES, WORK OF THE GLEEMEN.

Not only was song used to draw a crowd, but the Bible narratives and the Gospel story itself, in the form of metric paraphrase, were sung to the unlettered, half-converted people. The most famous of the gleemen was Caedman, who, Bede tells us, though entirely ignorant and uneducated, received a vision in which he was told to "Sing the beginning of created beings",<sup>2</sup> and who thereafter "was wont to make pious and religious verses, so that whatever was interpreted to him out of Scripture, he soon after put the same into poetical expressions of much sweetness and humility, in English, which was his native language. By his verses the minds of many were often excited to despise the world, and to aspire to heaven".<sup>2</sup> The abbess "ordered that he should be taught the whole of sacred history. Thus Caedmon, keeping in mind all he heard, and as it were chewing the cud, converted the same into most harmonious verse; and sweetly repeating the same, made his masters in their turn his hearers".<sup>3</sup> "He sang the creation of the world, the origin of

1. Cf. Canton, Bible and Anglo-Saxon People, 6.
2. Giles, Bede, III, 113, 115
3. Ibid. III, 115, 117.

man, and all the history of Genesis; and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering into the land of promise, with many other histories from holy writ; the incarnation, passion, resurrection, of our Lord, and the ascension into heaven; the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the preaching of the apostles; also the terror of future judgment, the horror of the pains of hell, and the delights of heaven; besides many more about the Divine benefits and judgments, by which he endeavoured to turn away all men from the love of vice, and to excite in them the love of, and application to, good actions; for he was a very religious man."<sup>1</sup> Thus through the work of Caedmon, Cynewulf, and others, the common people received at an early date "a rudimentary Bible-knowledge to which otherwise, they must for long have remained strangers".<sup>2</sup> "Portions of the Bible-story began to be sung in their ears in the well-known strains of the old Teutonic minstrelsy which was their delight".<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. TRANSLATIONS OF PORTIONS.

The metric paraphrases were soon followed by vernacular translations into Anglo-Saxon of portions of the Old and New Testaments. There are no extant copies of the earliest of which there is record. These were the Psalms translated early in the eighth century by Guthlac the Hermit, and by Ealdhelm Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne.<sup>4</sup> Cuthbert,

1. Giles, Bede, III, 115, 117.

2. Hoare, Evolution of the English Bible, 27.

3. Ibid. 26.

4. Cf. Canton, Bible and Anglo-Saxon People, 6.

the disciple of Bede, recorded that his master had at about the same time made a translation of John's Gospel. Some have assumed that he translated the Gospels in order and that he therefore had translated all four Gospels. On the other hand modern scholarship has cast some doubt on the question whether Bede translated even John's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Without having to decide this question, it may be noted that the fact that <sup>a</sup> contemporary writer recorded that the Venerable Bede with great effort and zeal translated John's Gospel at least shows that the idea of rendering the Scriptures into the vernacular existed in the minds of men at that early time and met with the approval of those who by common consent were held to be most learned and saintly.

The earliest extant translations are three Anglo-Saxon Psalters dating from the latter part of the ninth century.<sup>2</sup> These are interlineated with old Latin manuscripts of the Psalms, "that is to say, they are word-for-word renderings of a Latin original, in which each English term is as far as possible placed under its Latin equivalent".<sup>3</sup> One of these Latin versions dates from the sixth century and is believed to have been the gift of Gregory the Great to Augustine, sent to England in 601.<sup>4</sup> The earliest extant Gospels are also in interlinear form. The first, known as the Lindisfarne or Durham Gospels, dates from the tenth century. The second called the Rushworth Gospels came a generation later and were followed

1. Cf. Leach, *Schools of Mediaeval England*, 52.

2. Cf. Canton, *Bible and Anglosaxon People*, 11.

3. Hoare, *Evolution of the English Bible*, 33.

4. Cf. Canton, *Bible and Anglo-Saxon People*, 11, 12.

And Giles, *Bede*, II, 139.

by others. There are numerous extant manuscripts of later translations, not interlinear. "At the close of the tenth century, Abbot Aelfric --- made an Anglo-Saxon version of the Pentateuch, and also of Joshua, Judges, Esther, Job, part of the Book of Kings and the Books of Judith and Maccabees. In translating the history of the Maccabean rising, Aelfric says he was impelled by a hope of thus kindling among his countrymen a patriotic war-spirit against the Danes. He tells us moreover that he was able to make some use of earlier versions, but none such have up to the present time been recovered. It must be remembered, however, in explanation of the gaps in our biblical literature which are so much regretted, that the national records have sadly suffered from the barbarism of the Dane, as well as from the contempt of the Norman for all things Saxon".<sup>1</sup> Besides making the above mentioned translations Aelfric wrote a treatise "Concerning the Old and New Testament" urging the laity to read translated portions.<sup>2</sup>

##### 5. MONASTIC AND CATHEDRAL SCHOOLS.

During the early Middle Ages there was a period of remarkable enlightenment in England. At a time when learning was in a general state of decay throughout Europe, England, which until quite recently had been mostly pagan, became the radiating center of learning, and English teachers were sought after by foreign courts. "An immense enthusiasm for the Church, culture, and literature of Rome resulted from the merging of the" Roman Church with Irish Christianity at the Council of Whitby in 664,

1. Hoare, Evolution of the English Bible, 35.

2. Cf. Canton, Bible and Anglo-Saxon People, 19.

"and the English monasteries, such as Jarrow and Wearmouth, and cathedral schools, like York, became the great educational centers for Europe."<sup>1</sup> The Venerable Bede, who was largely responsible for the fame of Jarrow and Wearmouth, has already been quoted as urging the importance of preaching and of Bible study. He evidently practised what he preached, for his own letters and historical works are full of Scripture quotations, references, and similes, such as the statement concerning Redwal, king of the East Saxons, that "like the ancient Samaritans, he seemed at the same time to serve Christ and the gods whom he had served before".<sup>2</sup> In his History, when describing the virtues of a saint of former times, he seems to have regarded acquaintance with Scripture as most commendable and worthy of mention wherever possible; his statement that "the most reverend and holy father and priest Egbert --- was most learned in the Scriptures" , is typical.<sup>3</sup> He not only urged their duty upon the clergy, but commended laymen for zeal for the Scriptures. In addressing the "History of the English Nation" to King Coelwulph, he wrote, "And I cannot but commend the sincerity and zeal, with which you not only diligently give ear to hear the words of the Holy Scripture, but also industriously take care to become acquainted with the actions and sayings of former men of renown, especially of our own nation."<sup>4</sup>

The learning of the cathedral schools was no less Scriptural than that of the monasteries, at this early period. In his poem "On the Saints of the Church at York" Alcuin of York, born

1. Graves, Student's History of Education 56.

2. Giles, Bede, II, 239.

3. Ibid. II, 275.

4. Ibid. II, 23.

in 735, described Ethelbert, the great master at the school at York, as teaching a great variety of subjects, and "above all, opening the mysteries of holy writ, -- and so the teacher had many disciples in the sacred volumes".<sup>1</sup> He later became Archbishop of York, "But his old fervent industry for reading the Scriptures diminished not for the weight of his cares, and he was made both a wise doctor and a pious priest", as we are told in the same poem.<sup>2</sup> Alcuin himself was called by Charlemagne to organize and conduct a school at his court. The series of educational proclamations, drawn up under the influence of Alcuin, and sent out by Charlemagne, are illustrative of the Scriptural emphasis in the teaching of Alcuin. Not only do they contain many quotations from the Bible, but they strongly urge study of the Scriptures. They express "fear lest perchance, as the skill in writing was less, so also the wisdom for understanding the Holy Scriptures might be much less than it rightly ought to be. --- Therefore, we exhort you not only not to neglect the study of letters, but also with most humble mind, pleasing to God, to study earnestly in order that you may be able more easily and more correctly to penetrate the mysteries of the divine Scriptures".<sup>3</sup> Alcuin's letters also express this spirit. From Tours, where he had been made abbot of the monastery, he wrote to Charlemagne, "I am striving to dispense the honey of Holy Scripture".<sup>4</sup> Feeling the lack of books, which he remembered to be plentiful at York, he asked permission, in the same letter, that he might send youths to England to copy or secure books

1. Cubberley, Readings in the History of Education, 86.
2. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 59.
3. Cubberley, Readings, 90.
4. Ibid. 92.93.

"and return to France with the flowers of Britain; that the garden may not be confined to York alone but may bear fruit in Tours. --- through all the pages of Holy Scripture we are urged to learn wisdom."1 The great scholar, Rhabanus Maurus, was a student under Alcuin at Tours, and his writings clearly show the Scriptural influence of his master. In his "Education of the Clergy" he discussed the Seven Liberal Arts, and quoting from both the Old and New Testaments, he endeavored to show that the Arts, in addition to their **other** useful virtues, were of special value because they either contributed to one's understanding of Scripture or one's ability to defend the faith.2

1. Cubberley, Readings, 92, 93.
2. Cf. Ibid, 106-10.

## II. REBIRTH OF LEARNING.

### 1. KING ALFRED.

The invasion of the pagan Danes in the ninth century brought to a sudden close the early period of enlightenment. Many churches and the historic records they contained were destroyed, and much of the country was, for a time, thrown into a state of intellectual darkness. "A gloomy interval in the history of English education ensued after the ---- widespread devastation caused by the Viking invasions. When the curtain rises again, the scene has shifted from the North and the Midlands to the South, and centers in the great figure of Alfred".<sup>1</sup> In addition to his own tasks as king 871-901, he especially encouraged and patronized learning, founding the New Minster at Winchester, his capital, and urged, and himself engaged in, the translation of books into Anglo-Saxon. He had teachers brought in from outside, of whom it is recorded that Werefrith, bishop of Worcester, was "a man well versed in divine Scripture", and Grimbald from Gaul, "most learned in holy Scripture."<sup>2</sup> Alfred was interested in the spread of Scriptural knowledge, and his biographer recorded that his children "have carefully learned the Psalms".<sup>2</sup> The introduction to his translation of Gregory's "Pastoral Care" laments the sad state into which learning had fallen in his realm, and shows his interest in the Bible, and especially in translation into <sup>the</sup> vernacular. He writes, "I wondered extremely that the good and wise men who were formerly all over England, and had learned perfectly all the books, did not wish to translate them into their own language ---- I remembered how the law was

1. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 67.

2. Asser, Life of Alfred the Great, trans. by Giles, 68,70.

first known in Hebrew, and when the Greeks had learned it how they translated the whole of it into their own language, and all other books besides. And again the Romans, when they had learned it, translated the whole of it, through learned interpreters into their own language. And also all other Christian nations translated a part of it into their own language.--- see to it that all the free born youth now in England, who are rich enough to be able to devote themselves to it, be set to learn as long as they are not fit for any occupation, until they are well able to read English writing; and let those afterwards be taught more in the Latin language who are to continue learning, and be promoted to a higher rank".<sup>1</sup>

## 2. EFFECTS OF THE NORMAN INVASION

England was again invaded, by the Norman French under William the Conqueror in 1066. As the invaders in this case were already Christian, the effects were not as immediately disastrous; but they were nevertheless of great importance and of more lasting significance than the brief devastation caused by the Danes. Norman French became the "vernacular of the upper classes in the country, of the middle classes in the towns, and of the whole cultured and clerkly class."<sup>2</sup> Even as late as 1327 Higden's Polychronicon mentions the corruption into which the English language had fallen. It "comes to-day," he says, "chiefly from two things, viz. that boys in school, contrary to the custom of all other nations, since the first coming of the Normans, abandoning their own tongue are compelled to construe in French; and also that noblemen's sons from their

1. Cubberley, Readings, 95.

2. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 103.

very cradles are taught the French idiom; and country men wishing to be like them, that so they may appear respectable, endeavour to Frenchify themselves with all their might".<sup>1</sup> Before 1400, however, the schools had returned to the use of English.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of Norman French added another language in which the Bible might be studied, but it did not replace the language of the common people. "In addition to a translation of the Bible into Norman-French, --- there are many metrical paraphrases and renderings of Scripture --- which circulated freely in parts of England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries".<sup>2</sup> In spite of a tendency on the part of some to "Frenchify themselves with all their might", on the whole the common people held stubbornly to their Anglo-Saxon until at length it won the mastery, and the vital influences of the Bible continued to stream out into the succeeding generations in its traditional written forms. Witness the Ormulum, that vast metrical paraphrase, with homiletical commentary, of the daily Gospel portions of the ecclesiastical year, -- late in the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century; the rhymed north-country version of the Psalms by an unknown poet who wrote about 1260-1280; the prose Psalter of William of Shoreham, near Sevenoaks (1313-1327), and that of Richard Rolle of Hampole (died 1349) ".<sup>3</sup> The author of the Ormulum says, "If any one wants to know why I have done this deed, I have done it so that all young Christian folk may depend upon the Gospel only, and may follow with all their might its holy teaching, in thought and word, and deed."<sup>2</sup>

1. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 181.

2. Hoare, Evolution of the English Bible, 38.

3. Canton, Bible and the Anglo-Saxon People, 19, 20.

There were other results of the Norman invasion more serious than the introduction of the French language. "One of the worst effects of the Conquest was the foisting of the Italian adventurer Lanfranc into the See of Canterbury. --- He and his pupil and successor Anselm were too busy in promoting monasticism and the Papal power and in riveting on the necks of the Latin West the doctrine of Transubstantiation, in opposition to Berengarius, and the rational doctrine of the Sacrament, which Aelfric's works show to have prevailed in England before the Conquest, to have time or inclination for improving the schools".<sup>1</sup> During this period there was a great growth of monasticism which for a time threatened to completely drive out the secular clergy; "not only schools but churches and hospitals, boroughs and markets were brought under the dominion of the 'religious', the monks and the regular canons. A wave of monastic furore swept over Europe, and threatened to annihilate the secular clergy all together, as in the Buddhist regions of Thibet and China, or reduce them to the merely subordinate position as 'poor parsons of a town', which they hold in the Greek Church, while all the lucrative and governing posts are held by monks".<sup>2</sup> Enforced celibacy was not practiced by the secular clergy in England during the early Middle Ages. Marriage, therefore, " which the monks chose to call luxuria or lechery, was the real crime for which the secular canons were superseded in the twelfth century by regular canons".<sup>3</sup> Changes took place, however, "just in time to save the Western Church, and England in particular, from falling entirely under the

1. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 96,99.

2. Ibid. 120

3. Ibid. 94.

dominion of the monks --- About 1150 even in England the clergy at length yielded to the monastic craze and abandoned the struggle against enforced celibacy".<sup>1</sup> The rise of the universities during this period also served to check the advance of monasticism.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

Early in the Middle Ages theology often formed a part of the Grammar School curriculum, but later its teaching was taken over by the universities.<sup>2</sup> It was always considered the chief of the sciences, toward which other studies served as a preparation; but as time went on it tended to become less and less Biblical but more scholastic and dogmatic. However, even as late as the fourteenth century, William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, and justly famous as the founder of New College at Oxford and Winchester College, on an episcopal visitation of the Priory at Winchester, ordered that they provide a grammar master to instruct the novices, because they were ignorant of what they read "and walking in the wilderness out of the way, defile and pervert the sound meaning of the Scripture; and so it happens that while they cannot savour Holy Writ, they are rendered more inclined to do wickedly". He urged that they be instructed that they might "comprehend what they read, and become as they ought, better prepared to behold clearly the mysteries of the Scriptures".<sup>3</sup> On several occasions during the Middle Ages councils ordered that religious instruction be given. "The seventh canon of the Council of Clovesho, held in 747 --- ordered that bishops, abbots, and abbesses should take care that Scripture reading should be continually practiced in their

1. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 129.

2. Cf. Ibid. 59, 139.

3. Leach, History of Winchester College, 24.

families,--- 'Moreover let the boys at school be compelled and exercised in the love of sacred learning, that so they may be found well learned for all the needs of God's Church'".<sup>1</sup>

Though the study of Theology was relegated to the universities, several years of Bible study were prerequisite for taking work for Theological degrees.<sup>2</sup> But "the great mediaeval textbooks on theology gradually superseded the study of the Bible. This tendency increased with time".<sup>3</sup> Roger Bacon, the English monk writing in the thirteenth century, clearly described and lamented this tendency to substitute theology and philosophy for the Bible. "Although the principal study of the theologian ought to be in the text of Scripture, as I have proved in the former part of this work, yet in the last fifty years theologians have been principally occupied with questions (for debate) as all know, in tractates and summae,--horseloads, composed by many,-- and not at all with the most holy text of God. And accordingly, theologians give a readier reception to a treatise of scholastic questions than they will do to one about the text of Scripture. --- The greater part of these questions introduced into theology, with all the modes of disputation and solution, are in the terms of philosophy, as is known to all theologians, who have been well exercised in philosophy before proceeding to theology. Again other questions which are in use among theologians, though in terms of theology, viz., of the Trinity, of the fall, of the incarnation, of sin, of virtue, of the sacraments, etc., are mainly ventilated by

1. Leach, Schools of Mediaeval England, 55.

2. Cf. Rashdall, Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages, Vol. II, part II, 452. Found in Cubberley, Readings, 172

3. Cubberley, Readings, 175.

authorities, arguments, and solutions drawn from philosophy. And therefore the entire occupation of theologians now-a-days is philosophical, both in substance and method" .<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the formal, conscious training in religion and the Scriptures, which latter seems to have diminished as time went on, it should not be forgotten that there was constantly present the influence of innumerable church services, litanies, and ceremonies. This conveyed some Scriptural truth to the common people in a vague, more or less unintelligible form, but was better understood by the students who knew Latin, and was absorbed by them without conscious effort as they attended the services and assisted the priests in parts of the ceremonies or took part as members of the choir. In Abbot Aelfric's Latin Colloquy written in 1005, there is an interesting dialogue between the master and the boys, which illustrates the atmosphere of constant church services in which they passed their days and nights. Master, "You, boy, what did you do today? B. I did many things. At night when I heard the bell, I got out of bed and went to church and sang the martyrology and lauds; after that, prime and the seven psalms with litanies and first mass; next tierce, and did the mass of the day; after that we sang sext, and ate and drank and slept, and then we got up again and sang nones, and now here we are before you ready to listen to what you tell us. M. When will you sing vespers or compline? B. When it's time. --- M. Who calls you to nocturnes? B. Sometimes I hear the bell, and get up; sometimes my master wakes me with a ground-ash. M. All you good children and clever scholars, your teacher exhorts you to keep the commandments of God, and behave properly

1. Roger Bacon, Opera Inedita, p. lvi: trans. by J.S. Brewer, found in Cubberley, Readings, 175.

everywhere. Walk quietly when you hear the church bells, and go into church, and bow to the holy altars, and stand quietly and sing in unison, and ask pardon for your sins, and go out again without playing, to the cloister or to school".<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY PERIOD.

Before passing on to the second part of this thesis a few outstanding features of the early period should be noted. In spite of changes that began to take place it may be said in general of this early period that there was little opposition to the study of the Bible, or suspicion that knowledge of the Scriptures implied the possession of heretical views. The greatest teachers and ecclesiastics were the most zealous in teaching and urging the study of the Bible. Bishops devoted themselves to the translation of portions of the Bible into the vernacular. These early translations "Wholly devotional in their origin and purpose --- aroused no controversy, and were mixed up with no political strife or social grievances. The people and their clergy were in happy union".<sup>2</sup> There was much ignorance and illiteracy even in the church, and Bede complained bitterly of ungodliness and luxury in the monasteries, "but it was still the Church of the people".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many of the abuses which Wyclif later attacked, such as the doctrine of transubstantiation and the enforced celibacy of the secular clergy were not introduced into the English Church until later in this early period. Had Wyclif lived at this time just four hundred years before he

1. Leach, Educational Charters, 45,47.

2. Canton, Bible and the Anglo-Saxon People, 22.

actually did, he would not have found so much necessity for a reformation. He would not have met some of the abuses which he felt it his duty to attack; much of his teaching and certainly his desire to translate the Bible into the language of the common people would have met with no opposition.

PART TWO. WYCLIF.

I. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS TIMES.

In order to understand the work of John Wyclif and the content of his writings, certain outstanding characteristics of his time should be noted. Not only was the study of the Bible not encouraged among the common people, but, as has been pointed out, even at the universities the direct study of the Bible itself was more and more superseded by mediaeval theology and scholastic philosophy. Also, since the Norman invasion, certain dogmas and ecclesiastical abuses had come in, which tended to strengthen the power of the popes and the grip with which the whole priestly system held the bodies and souls of the people. On the other hand with the growth of the spirit of nationalism there was increased resentment against papal control. There was "manifest a disposition to limit the jurisdiction and set bounds to the encroachments of the Church, and especially to curtail foreign ecclesiastical interference in the affairs of the kingdom. --- Two important statutes of Edward III. were the consequence: the statute of provisors, which devolved on the King the right to fill the Church offices that had been reserved to the Pope; and the statute of praemunire, which forbade subjects to bring, by direct prosecution or appeal, before any foreign tribunal a cause that fell under the King's jurisdiction".<sup>1</sup> This anti-clerical feeling was greatly increased by resentment against the numerous taxes, annates, tithes, and other levies and pecuniary exactions demanded by the Roman curia. "The effect of these various forms of ecclesiastical oppression upon public

1. Fisher, The Reformation, 33.

opinion was the greater, when it was known that the wealth thus gained went to support at Avignon an extremely luxurious and profligate court, the boundless immorality of which has been vividly depicted by Petrarch, an eye-witness".<sup>1</sup> This was especially true in England due to the fact that she was engaged in war with France. "During the reign of Edward, the pontiffs resided at Avignon, and being, together with their cardinals, commonly Frenchmen, the animosity against France disposed the people of England to regard the policy of the papal court as that of a power naturally allied to France, and to look on all proceedings with a suspicion and disaffection which might not otherwise have been felt".<sup>2</sup> Wyclif expressed this feeling when he complained that though "clerks send unto our enemies all the rents that they have in our land, and what ever they may rob or steal of the king's liege men",<sup>3</sup> they were rendered immune by the protection of separate ecclesiastical courts. Not only the degenerate condition of the papacy itself during the 'Babylonian Captivity' at Avignon and the Great Schism but the general state of luxury, worldliness, and immorality among the clergy and the prevalence of simony and corruption all tended to enhance the anti-clerical feeling. Wyclif's writings are full of censures of the clerical evils of his day; and, aside from his works, there is abundant evidence of the strong feeling aroused by the corruptions and abuses of the church. A bill introduced in the 'Good Parliament' in 1376 complains of the many ecclesiastical abuses, and urges that the statutes against provisors be

1. Fisher, The Reformation, 32.

2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises of John de Wyclif, xxv.

3. Complaint to King and Parliament, Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 264.

renewed and enforced. After complaining that the taxes sent to the papal court were five times greater than those received by the king, it says, "and while for money the brokers of that sinful city-Rome- promote many caitiffs, being altogether unlearned and unworthy, to a thousand marks' living yearly, the learned and worthy can hardly obtain twenty marks: whereby learning decayeth, aliens and enemies to their land, who never saw, nor care to see, their parishioners, having those livings; whereby they despise God's service, and convey away the treasure of the realm, and are worse than Jews or Saracens. --- God has given his sheep to the popes to be pastured, and not to be shorn or shaven; and that lay patrons, perceiving the simony and covetousness of the pope, do thereby learn to sell their benefices to mere brutes, no otherwise than Christ was sold to the Jews. --- the pope's collector, and other strangers, the king's enemies, and only lieger spies for English dignities, and disclosing the secrets of the realm, ought to be discharged". The bill states further, "that the pope, to ransom Frenchmen, the king's enemies, who defend Lombardy for him, doth always, at his pleasure, levy a subsidy of the whole clergy of England: --- no papal collector or proctor should remain in England, upon pain of life and limb".<sup>1</sup> 'The Plowman's Tale', which has been attributed to Chaucer, though without sufficient grounds, also clearly reflects the strong anti-clerical feeling of the times.

"They ben curates of many towns,  
On erthe they have greet powere.  
They han greet prebendes and dere,  
Some two or three, and some (han) mo,  
-----

1. Vaughan, Tracts and treatises, xxxii. xxxiii.

Some hir churc(h)es never ne sye,  
Ne never o peny thider ne sende;  
Though the pore parishens for hunger dye,  
O peny on hem wil they nat spende.  
Have they receivinge of the rent,  
They reck never of the remenant".<sup>1</sup>

"That hye on horse willeth ryde  
In glitterand golde of grete aray,  
I-paynted and portred all in pryde;  
No comun knight may go so gay.  
Chaunge of clothing every day,  
With golden girdles grete and small;  
As boystous as a bere at bay;  
All such felshed mot nede fall.

-----  
And Christes people proudly curse  
With brode bokes, and braying bell;  
To putte pennyces in hir purse  
They woll sell both heven and hell;

-----  
And though the soth thou of hem tell,  
In greet cursinge shalt thou fall.

-----  
Hir heed loveth all honour  
And to be worshipped in worde and dede;  
Kinges mot to hem knele and cource;  
To the apostles, that Christ forbode;  
To popes hestes such taketh more hede  
Than to kepe Christes commaundement".<sup>2</sup>

"They say that Peter had the key  
Of hevin and hell, to have and hold;  
I trowe Peter took no money  
For no sinnes that he sold!

-----  
I trowe, they have the key of hell;  
Hir maister is of that place marshall".<sup>3</sup>

1. Skeat, The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, VII, 170, 171.  
2. Ibid. VII, 151-153.  
3. Ibid. 158, 159.

## II. WYCLIF'S EARLY LIFE AND WORK

Very little is known with certainty of Wyclif's early life and education. Even the place and date of his birth and the places at which he studied are matters of dispute among historians. This lack of details may be due partly to the zealous attempt made by his enemies after his death to destroy all trace of his life and work; and the confusion is rendered worse by disagreement among the authorities as to whether certain records concerning men by the name of John Wyclif refer to the great Reformer or to some other person. However, in this thesis it will not be necessary to enter into a discussion of these mooted points or attempt to reconstruct a complete biography. It is probable that Wyclif was born about 1320 at Hipswell in Yorkshire.<sup>1</sup> He studied and became a master at Balliol College at Oxford. There he became proficient in scholastic philosophy and in civil and canon law. He also studied theology though not receiving his doctorate of theology until 1372. "Long before Wyclif had become a power outside of Oxford his fame was established in the university. He was acknowledged supreme in the philosophical disputations of the schools, and his lectures were crowded. His influence was, however, purely academic, nor does it seem to have been inspired at the outset by any conscious opposition to the established order of the church".<sup>2</sup> "Even his enemy, Henry de Knyghton, acknowledged that in philosophy he was reckoned as inferior to none, and as unequalled in the exercises of the

1. Cf. Poole, *Wycliffe and Movements for Reform*, 62.

2. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, xxviii, 867.

schools', and spoke of him as 'a man of profound wit, exceptionally strong and effective in disputations - one who was regarded by the common sort of divines as little less than a god.'<sup>1</sup> Until comparatively late in life he was not regarded as a heretic. In 1374 he was given by the king the rectory of Lutterworth in Leicestershire; and the fact that in the same year he was sent as a royal envoy to confer with the papal legates at Bruges about a matter of dispute between the English state and the papacy, indicates that he was not at that time 'persona non grata' at Rome.<sup>2</sup>

1. Hearnshaw, Social and Political Ideas of the Middle Ages, 200.
2. Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, xxviii, 867.

### III. WYCLIF'S CONTROVERSIES.

#### 1. AGAINST THE MONASTIC ORDERS.

It may seem strange that a man who had lived most of his life without attracting the animosity of the church should late in life engage in so fearless and bitter an attack upon the whole established order. In order the better to understand this and also his teachings themselves, before taking up a study of Wyclif's writings and teachings, it will be well to note briefly the chief controversies in which he was engaged; for there was a close relation between his controversies and his writings and teachings. Much of his writing was a result of, or a part of, his controversies; and the controversies themselves were the result of a definite and final conviction, arrived at by his study of the Bible, that the dogmas and practice of the church of his day had departed far from the teaching, purpose and spirit of its Founder.

Wyclif's earliest struggle was that against the monks. We have already seen how the monastic orders had taken over many churches and schools and for a time threatened to drive out the secular clergy entirely. "Their zeal to proselyte the young in the universities, exposed them to much suspicion and disaffection --- Fitz-Ralph, who was chancellor of Oxford in 1330, and became archbishop of Armagh in 1347, distinguished himself as an opponent of their opinions and encroachments. He denied the virtue of their voluntary poverty, censured their inroads on the province of the parochial clergy, and declared, that by their influence, the students at Oxford had been" greatly reduced in

number.<sup>1</sup> He submitted complaints to the pope, but died without accomplishing anything. Even Parliament made regulations "with a view to protect the universities against certain mischiefs which had resulted from the conduct of the friars. It was determined that no secular under the age of eighteen should be admitted into any mendicant order, that no document tending in any manner to the injury of the universities should be hereafter received from the pope, and that all differences between mendicants and the older authorities in those seminaries should be decided in future in the court of the king, and without further appeal".<sup>2</sup> But inspite of these efforts the monks had become very powerful and held many of the professorships at Oxford. This controversy, therefore, was not begun by Wyclif; he simply "identified himself with the --- secular or parish clergy in their struggle against the aspiring mendicant order".<sup>3</sup> The failure of Fitz-Ralph convinced him that it was useless to expect help from the pope and suggested "the necessity of a more complete exposure of ecclesiastical corruption, and of a more vigorous appeal to the common sense of every class among the people".<sup>4</sup> Although Wyclif did not initiate this struggle he carried it forward with greater vigor because, in addition to the reasons which impelled his predecessors, he believed that the monastic orders were largely to blame for the increased hold of the papacy upon

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xiii.

2. Ibid. xxiv.

3. Fisher, The Reformation, 50

4. Vaughan, Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe, I, 267.

the state and people, and the introduction of abuses, doctrinal error, and superstitions. For example, attacking the monkish teachings that those endowing a monastery or entering a monastic order were thereby saved, he wrote, "Also freris prysen more hor rooten habite then the worschipful body of oure Jesus Crist. Ffor thei techen lordis, and namely ladies, that if thei dyen in Fraunceys habite thei schul nevere cum in helle for vertu therof; and certis this is an open heresie, dampnyng alle that tristen thus into hor lyves ende."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Wyclif felt that Christ's teaching was sufficient, and he therefore objected to the rule of the monastic orders as something added onto or displacing the perfect teaching of Christ. He also opposed the idea of having special rules separating some Christians from the main body of Christ's followers. His attitude is clearly shown in the following quotations, in which he subjects the monastic orders to the test of the Bible, and finds them wanting. "The rule of Jesus Christ, youen to his apostles, and kept of them, after Christ's ascension, is most perfect, to be kept for state of living in this world; and each rule, of what kin, private sect, or singular religion, made of sinful men, is less perfect, than the rule youen of Christ, of his endless wisdom, and his endless charity, to mankind; --- Christ's clean religion, without error of any sinful fool, -- Christ's clean religion, without clouting of sinful men's errors, is most perfect of all, --- Christ's clean religion, without new wrong traditions of sinful men, that oft erred in their own life and

1

1. Fifty heresies and errors of friars, Arnold,  
Select English Works of John Wyclif, III, 382.

teachings --- Also Christ, in making the rule and order of apostles, was in this time, and ever before, Almighty, alwitty, all full of good will and charity, to make perfect rule; --- Christ's rule is enough, and able for all men on live, of whatever complexion or age they be of --- Christ's religion in his cleanness --- is most perfect, most easy, and light, for to keep, and most siker to bring men to heaven, and to highest degree of bliss".<sup>1</sup> "For if these new rules were alone with Christ's rule youen to apostles, Christ should have taught them both, and ensampled them both in his life and speaking and writing with ceremonies, and rites, and customs there of; but he did not this never in his death, nor after his resurrection, nor to his ascension. --- Christ's rule given to apostles is like and of o form to all men that make profession thereto --- but rules of these private sects be full diverse and contrary, --- full many articles of rules of such sects be openly contrary to the apostles' rule; since it is lawful to each true man of Christian religion, to convert a man of wrong faith to Christianity; but this is forboden in the rule of friars minors, since only to ministers " is it permitted."<sup>2</sup> Wyclif sought the complete destruction of the monastic orders, "as being repugnant to Scripture, and inconsistent with the order and prosperity of the church".<sup>3</sup> He did not succeed in his own day, but it is worth while to note that wherever the Reformation, toward which he was working, was successful, it was accompanied by the dissolution of the monastic orders.

1. Complaint to King and Parliament, Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 260,261.

2. Ibid. 262,263.

3. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xv.

## 2. CONTROVERSY AGAINST PAPAL CLAIMS.

By espousing the cause of the state against the temporal claims of the church, Wyclif won the suspicion and animosity of the ecclesiastical authorities, and at the same time the favor and protection of the crown and such powerful patrons as John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. He insisted that the crown was supreme in all civil matters within the realm, that the civil authorities might prevent all money from being sent out of the country, and might even confiscate the temporal possessions of the evil clergy, and "that the cares of his holiness be restricted to the spiritual things proper to his office".<sup>1</sup> Since the time of King John, the pontiffs had claimed and often received tribute from England on the pretext that England and Ireland, having been handed over to the apostolic see by King John in return for release from the interdict, were held by the popes in feudal fee. Wyclif, among other arguments refuting this claim, said that if it be admitted to be true the only conclusion could be that the pope had himself been guilty of simony, by selling, in exchange for temporal possession and tribute, the spiritual blessings, which it should be the joy of his holy office to dispense charitably. Parliament refused to recognize that King John or anyone else had the right to bestow the realm upon the pope without the consent of Parliament. In 1374, therefore, royal envoys including Wyclif were sent to Bruges to discuss with the papal delegates this matter and also the question of provisors. Wyclif successfully refuted the papal

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxi.

claims to feudal dominion over England;<sup>1</sup> but, although negotiations dragged on for two years, no satisfactory conclusion was reached in the matter of provisors. "It is probable that to the insight into the spirit and policy of the papal court thus obtained, we are to ascribe the severity which subsequently marks the strictures of Wycliffe concerning the higher clergy generally, and especially concerning the popes, and their immediate coadjutors".<sup>2</sup> Returning to England he lived at Lutterworth and Oxford, and his visits to London soon established his fame and popularity as a preacher. Thus far his open attack had been largely against the political rather than the dogmatic elements in the papal system. In his works 'De civili dominio' and 'De officio regis' he stated his views on temporal possession and the proper relation of church and state. The latter work "portrays and advocates a relation of Church and State essentially identical with that later established by Henry VIII: it displays the king as supreme over ecclesiastical persons, ecclesiastical property, ecclesiastical courts. It exalts the State as against the Church".<sup>3</sup> In 1377 he was first charged with heresy, and was summoned to appear before Bishop Courtenay at St. Paul's, to "answer to the charge of holding and publishing certain erroneous and heretical opinions"<sup>4</sup>, although the real cause of clerical anxiety was the growing influence, in Parliament and among the people, of his teachings against papal taxes and claims to temporal dominion. His judges were much

1. Cf. Hearnshaw, Social and Political Ideas, 204.
2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxxi.
3. Hearnshaw, Social and Political Ideas, 217.
4. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxxiv.

discomfited by finding that Wyclif came accompanied by his powerful supporter, the Duke of Lancaster, and by Lord Percy. It is recorded that Bishop Courtenay insisted that the heretic stand while being examined, but Lord Percy said to him, "Wicliffe, sit down, for you have many things to answer to, and you need to repose yourself on a soft seat" .<sup>1</sup> The account in Fuller's Church History of the argument that ensued makes racy reading, and it is possible that the details did not lose any of their flavor in the recording. The resulting confusion was such that the meeting ended without Wyclif having an opportunity to say anything or any business being done. This fiasco was soon followed by five bulls from Gregory XI addressed to the University of Oxford and to various authorities in the government and church, condemning Wyclif's teachings and ordering that he be imprisoned and examined. These bulls were largely ignored by the state and the university, as they favored Wyclif's political views; moreover the university was jealous of its authority, and it was generally questioned whether the pope had the right to order an Englishman to be imprisoned. In the same year that the pope ordered Wyclif to be imprisoned and the spread of his views checked, Parliament asked his judgment as to whether a kingdom might not detain its treasure from being sent abroad, even though the pope demanded it.<sup>2</sup> The following year, 1378, Wyclif was summoned to appear before the bishops assembled at a synod at Lambeth. He presented a written defense of his views. This meeting was interrupted by London citizens

1. Fuller, Church History of Britain II, 341.

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica, xxviii, 868.

who crowded their way in "proclaiming their attachment to the person and doctrine of Wycliffe"<sup>1</sup> and was further disconcerted by the arrival of a royal messenger with an order that no sentence be passed against Wyclif. He was therefore permitted to go, after being charged to desist from promulgating his views.

### 3. SACRAMENTARIAN CONTROVERSY.

Although Wyclif's attack was at first directed chiefly against political abuses and the prevalent immorality of the clergy, he finally came to see clearly that much of the dogma of the mediaeval church was contrary to the teaching of the Bible, and that in particular the sacramental system, based on the doctrine of transubstantiation and placing man's only hope of salvation in the hands of an intermediary, miracle-working priesthood, was the tool by which the hierarchy, for selfish purposes kept the souls of men bound in a state of submission, ignorance, and fear. "The language in which he denounced transubstantiation anticipated that of the Protestant reformers".<sup>2</sup> In his works 'Triologus' and 'De eucharistia' he wrote that this doctrine "despoils the people and leads them to commit idolatry", and that it is a "blasphemous folly" and a "deceit".<sup>3</sup> His attack against this central doctrine of the papal system was made not only in Latin works, but was carried to the people in tracts and in his sermons. Many who had supported him as long as he was attacking papal taxes and advocating the cause of the state against the church, now withdrew their support.

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxxviii.

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica, xxviii, 869.

3. Triologus, lib. iv., cap. 22. De eucharistia, 249.  
Translation from Encyclopaedia Britannica, xxviii, 869.

The theologians at Oxford condemned his views. Even John of Gaunt refused to support him, and told him to refrain from his attack on the doctrine of transubstantiation. In 1382 Courtenay, now Archbishop of Canterbury, called a court of bishops and theologians, which met at the London convent of the Blackfriars, condemned Wyclif's writings as heretical, and finally brought his remaining supporters at the University to submission. Wyclif retired to Lutterworth where he translated, or at least supervised the translation of the first complete Bible in the English language, and where he continued to preach and write, until his death in 1384. Shortly before his death he was summoned by Urban VI to appear at Rome, but in a very interesting letter which will be quoted later he pleaded his age and feeble state, as sufficient excuse for his inability to make the long and, we may add, dangerous journey.

#### 4. CONTROVERSY CONCERNING TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.

At the same time that Wyclif was waging his attack upon the doctrine of transubstantiation, he began an organized effort to carry the Gospel to the people, by translating the Bible from the Vulgate into the vernacular, and by instituting his order of poor preachers to preach to the people, even though without episcopal permit. Wyclif became convinced that it was hopeless to expect a reform to come from the hierarchy itself. He determined to put the Bible into the hands of the common people, that they might be convinced by their own study of the great contrast between the simple Gospel and example of Christ and the doctrines and practice of the mediaeval church. During the Middle Ages "The Scriptures were always declared to be the

supreme source and authority for all questions of doctrines and morals",<sup>1</sup> but their study was more and more neglected; and so far from being encouraged, "a knowledge of the Scriptures in the vernacular, especially by uneducated men and women, was almost always deemed a sign of heretical tendency".<sup>2</sup> His enemies realized as well as he did what the effect of his translation was likely to be, and opposed it bitterly. His contemporary, Knighton, wrote, "Christ ---- delivered his doctrine to the doctors of the church, that they might administer to the laity and weaker persons according to the state of the times, and the wants of men. But this Master John Wycliffe translated it out of Latin into English and thus laid it more open to the laity, and women who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine; and that which was before precious to both clergy and laity, is rendered, as it were the common jest of both".<sup>3</sup> If Knighton's intent were not evident from the context, one might be in some uncertainty as to whether he wished to pay a tribute to the excellence of Wyclif's translation or to cast a slur upon the degree of proficiency in Latin to be found among the best scholars of his day. The intense opposition to Wyclif's work of translating into the vernacular continued many years after his death, and was expressed by the following decision of the English clergy in council in 1408. "The translation of the text of Holy Scriptures out of one tongue into another is a

1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 147.
2. Ibid. 149.
3. De Eventibus col. 2644. Translation found in Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, lx.

dangerous thing, as St. Jerome testifies, because it is not easy to make the verse in all respects the same. Therefore we enact and ordain that no one henceforth do, by his own authority, translate any text of the Holy Scriptures into the English tongue, --- nor let any such book or treatise now lately composed in the time of John Wycliffe aforesaid, or since, or hereafter to be composed, be read in whole or in part, in public or in private, under the pain of the greater excommunication".<sup>1</sup>

Wyclif's teachings concerning the place and authority of the Bible will be discussed later; it will be necessary here only to quote a few of his own statements giving his views concerning the translation and use of the Bible in the vernacular, and to note how he uses the Scriptures themselves to support his teaching on this subject. "And they say that it is heresy to speak of the holy scripture in English, and so they would condemn the Holy Ghost who gave it in tongues to the apostles of Christ, to speak the word of God in all languages that were ordained of God under heaven, as it is written, Acts xi. And the Holy Ghost descended upon the heathen, as he did upon the apostles in Jerusalem, as it is written, Joel ii. and Christ was so merciful as to send the Holy Ghost to the heathen men, Acts viii, x. and he made them partakers of his blessed word; why then should it be taken away from us in this land that are christian men?"<sup>2</sup> "That the truth may be known more plainly and diffusely, true men are under a necessity of declaring the opinion which they hold, not only in Latin, but in the vulgar

1. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae*, III, 317.  
Translation found in Vaughan, *Tracts and Treatises*, lxi.
2. Religious Tract Society, *Writings of John Wicliff*, 156, 157. From the tract, 'Wicket'.

tongue. --- Besides, since the truth of the faith is clearer and more exact in the Scriptures than the priests know how to express it; --- the faithful should themselves search out or discover the sense of the faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which they know and understand. --- Why, therefore, ought not the fountain of faith to be made known to the people by those means by which a man may know it most clearly? He, therefore who hinders this, does his endeavour that the people should continue in a damnable and unbelieving state. --- Christ and his Apostles, accordingly converted the most part of the world by making known the Scripture in a language which was most familiar to the people. For to this purpose did the Holy Spirit give them the knowledge of all tongues. Why, therefore, ought not the modern disciples of Christ to collect fragments from the same loaf, and after such example open the Scriptures clearly, and plainly to the people that they may know them?"<sup>1</sup> Wyclif's sermon on Christ sealed in the tomb clearly shows what he expected, and earnestly hoped, would result from the spread of Bible knowledge among the people. "Thus do our high priests and our new religious fear them, lest God's law, after all they have done, should be quickened. Therefore make they statutes as stable as a rock, and they obtain grace of knights to confirm them, --- and all lest the truth of God's laws, hid in the sepulchre, should break out to the knowing of the common people. Oh, Christ! thy law is hidden thus; when wilt thou send thy angel to remove the stone, and to show thy truth unto thy flock?"<sup>2</sup>

1. *Speculum Secularium Dominiorum*, translated in Vaughan, *Tracts and Treatises*, lxii, lxiii.
2. Homily, MS. Bib. Reg. British Museum. Quoted from Vaughan, *Tracts and Treatises*, lxxxiv.

#### IV. WYCLIF'S WRITINGS.

At the same period in which Chaucer was demonstrating the literary possibilities of the fast developing English language, in the field of verse, Wyclif, by his translation of the Bible and by his sermons, and polemical tracts and treatises, was establishing his "undisputed position as the founder of English prose writing".<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to determine the exact order of much of his literary work, but it is very probable that all his English works were produced in the last six or seven years of his life.<sup>2</sup> As might be expected from what has already been said of his early life and work, his earlier writings were probably all in Latin. These works show less freedom from the intricacies of scholastic philosophy and reasoning than do his English writings, arguing largely from the Bible and addressed to the common sense of the laity. As has been noted previously, he continued to write treatises in Latin even after his controversies began, but due to the polemical purpose of his English writings they contain all the doctrines that are typical of Wyclif. Writing of the change that took place from Latin to English, Arnold says, "In his earlier years, while he was a student, and than a doctor, at Oxford, he naturally wrote in Latin, the common tongue of the learned. But as he grew old, many circumstances would concur in leading him to employ more frequently the native speech; such as the fame of Chaucer, the example of Gower, the continual advances made by English upon French as the language of the upper classes,

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, xxviii, . 869.

2. Cf. Arnold, Select English Works of John Wyclif, III, viii

the interest which his great enterprise of translating the Bible into English must have caused him to take in his mother tongue, and lastly, the necessity, as the contest between him and his opponents increased in bitterness, of enlisting support for his opinions among the laity".<sup>1</sup>

There has been much uncertainty and disagreement among scholars as to the authenticity of certain of the works that have been attributed to Wyclif. Therefore many collections of his writings contain works which the best modern scholarship does not regard as having come from the pen of Wyclif himself. These were probably written by Wyclif's immediate followers. A number of them have been read in preparation for this thesis, and have been found to contain valuable material, showing the same reliance on the Bible, and the same vigorous opposition to the evils of the times. However, for purposes of quotation in this thesis, only those English works have been used, which are listed by Arnold as genuine works of Wyclif. In his scholarly analysis of the English works attributed to Wyclif he distinguishes between what he believes to be the genuine, doubtful, and spurious works.<sup>2</sup> Arnold was associated with Dr. Shirley, and often follows the latter's classification, though in some instances freely discarding works that even Dr. Shirley included as genuine. In quoting from works of Wyclif contained in Arnold's "Select English Works of John Wyclif" it has been thought best to modernize two obsolete letters, which can not be written on a typewriter, and which, if left unchanged, render the reading very much more difficult to the modern eye. Otherwise no changes have been made, and all the

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, viii.

2. Cf. Arnold Select English Works, III, xvii-xx.

vagaries of the old spelling retained. Of the first of these obsolete letters Mayhew says, "þ is the voiceless interdental spirant pronounced as English th in thin"<sup>1</sup>, and Bosworth says, "The hard or sharp sound of th in thing is represented in Anglo-Saxon by þ".<sup>2</sup> However, a study of Wyclif's use of this letter shows that he used it indiscriminately for any th, whether voiced or voiceless. Thus he used it in 'treupe' (truth), and also in 'þat' (that). The other obsolete letter is the old G, which Wyclif used to express a variety of sounds and silences. He used it as a G, as in 'forþyve' (forgive); as Gh having the sound of F, as in 'ynouþ' (enough); as a silent Gh, as in 'þouþt' (thought); as Y, as in 'þeer' (year); and as a supernumerary silent letter, as in 'þif' (if). The quotations made from the modernized spelling of the works found in Vaughan's "Tracts and Treatises of John de Wyclif, D.D." and the Religious Tract Society's "Writings of John Wickliff D.D." will be found easier to read. The glossary of Old English terms appended to this thesis will be helpful in deciphering the more difficult passages.

1. Mayhew, Synopsis of Old English Phonology, xv.
2. Bosworth, A Compendious Anglo-Saxon and English Dictionary, 268.

## V. TEACHINGS OF WYCLIF.

### 1. CONSCIOUSNESS OF A RETURN TO PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

Wyclif, like the later reformers, was aware of the fact that his teachings were not new, but constituted a return to the faith of the early church. What Lindsay says of Calvin may also be said of him, for he "did not think he was expounding a new theology --- The theology of the Reformation was the old teaching of the Church of Christ, and the doctrinal beliefs of the Reformers were those views of truth which were founded on the Word of God, and which had been known, or at least felt, by pious people all down the generations from the earliest centuries".<sup>1</sup> He not only did not regard himself as a heretic, but frequently, with a vigor of language characteristic of his day, accused his opponents of being heretics, and, as has been noted in the discussion of his controversy with the monks, he attacked the doctrines and practices of the mediaeval church as having been wrongfully superimposed upon the simple and true teachings of Christ. "And so the Gospel ought to be kept, without any fouling of all Christian men, without such novelries, and put nothing thereto, and draw nothing therefrom".<sup>2</sup> The opening of his paper presented at his trial at Lambeth expresses his own consciousness of his fidelity to the truth. "First of all, I publicly protest, as I have often done at other times, that I will and purpose from the bottom of my heart, by the grace of God, to be a sincere Christian; and as long as I have breath, to profess and defend the law of Christ so far as I am able.

1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, II, 100.

2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 263.

And if, through ignorance, or any other cause, I shall fail therein, I ask pardon of God, and do now from henceforth revoke and retract it, humbly submitting myself to the correction of Holy Mother Church".<sup>1</sup> That Wyclif was conscious of the fallen condition of the church in his day is clearly shown in one of his sermons, in which, after describing the condition of the Jews at the time of Christ, he said, "And so, it is licky that the Chirche farith now bi sleynge of treuthe that is Goddis lawe, so that men in erthe, clepid Cristen men, passen in malis Jewis and Sarasynes. And rote of this malice is coveitise of preestis, and levyng of Goddis lawe, and highyng of mannis lawe".<sup>2</sup> The following passage also shows where he took his stand, and how he classed his opponents. "Therefore pray we heartily to God, that he, of his mere mercy, will so strengthen us with the grace and stedfastness of his Holy Spirit, to make us strong in spiritual living, after the evangelical Gospel - so that the world - no not the very infidels, papists, and apostates - can gather occasion to speak evil of us, but that we may enter into that straight gate, as Christ our Savior and all that follow him have done".<sup>3</sup>

## 2. TEACHINGS BASED ON THE BIBLE.

Wyclif foreshadowed the later reformers by regarding the Word of God, rather than the church, as the seat of authority. Speaking of the reformers in general, Fisher says, "The new type of religion --- owed its being to the direct contact of the mind with the Scriptures. In them it found alike its source

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxxix.

2. Sermon XLII, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 119.

3. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 154.

and its regulative norm. --- The new spiritual life had consciously its fountain-head in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles. There was no pretense of devising a new religion, but only of reforming the old, according to its own authoritative standards".<sup>1</sup> "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, the primitive documents of the Christian religion, were brought forward in the original tongues, to serve as the touchstone by which the prevailing doctrinal and ecclesiastical system must be tested".<sup>2</sup> This may with truth be said of Wyclif, as shall be seen from a study of his own writings; for he "increasingly tended to bring all things to the test of the Gospel, until finally, at the end of a long and painful evolution, he proclaimed the Scriptures as interpreted by human reason to be the supreme standard of verity".<sup>3</sup> Wyclif clearly held up the Bible as the standard by which truth and error should be judged, when he said, "Nothing should be damned as error and false, but if it savour error or unrighteousness against God's law".<sup>4</sup> He often complained that men were so burdened with human laws and doctrines that they could not know the Bible, and that while open and general neglect of God's law was condoned, the breaking of the laws of sinful men was severely punished; "whi then shul Cristen men be chargid with so many statutis of worldly prestis, that thai may nout knowe holy writte for studying of hem? Ande if thai fayle in one poynt of these newe statutis made of covetouse men, thei schal be more punishid therefore then for brekyng

1. Fisher, The Reformation, 8.

2. Ibid. 61.

3. Hearnshaw, Social and Political Ideas, 200.

4. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 264.

of alle Goddis hestis".<sup>1</sup> Wyclif repeatedly taught that earthly authorities had power to demand obedience only so far as their commands were in accord with the teachings of Scripture. Papal bulls, anathemas, and decrees of pope and prelates amounted to nothing unless thus supported.<sup>2</sup> "And so men schulden graunte in dede to obeishe to the pope, as the peple obeishide to Petre, and as Goddis lawe wole axe; but it were to myche to pass this, for thanne men obeishiden to the fend, sith Goddis lawe schulde be reule, and teche how God wole that men obeishe".<sup>3</sup>

### 3. EMPHASIS ON PREACHING.

Closely associated with the place of preeminence which Wyclif gave to the Bible was his emphasis on the importance of preaching the Gospel to the people. He lamented the general lack of preaching of the right kind, intimating that much of such preaching as there was was of no value to the soul of the hearer. It is <sup>worth</sup> noticing in passing, in connection with this idea of the great importance of preaching for the souls of the people, that it was characteristic of the reformers that they emphasized the necessity of the individual believer's having an intelligent content of faith, rather than relying implicitly and ignorantly on the work of the priest. Wyclif taught that though the duty of preaching was not confined to the priests, it was especially incumbent upon them. His views on this point will be quoted at some length, in order to show how he based them directly upon the Bible. "This preching is al disusid, and turnid to pride and coveitise. For how ever men mai please the

1. 'On the Twenty Five Articles', Arnold, Select English Works, III, 461.
2. Cf. Pollard, Johannis Wycliffe, Dialogus, viii.
3. Sermon LXXV, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 247.

pepel, and with moneie wyne them worship, that thei prechen, and putten abak the profit of the peplis soule. This book was ordeyned of God to be red in this place".<sup>1</sup> "And thus shulden preestis preche to lordis, --- But the fend hath stranglid these houndis with talwe, that thei mai not berke".<sup>2</sup> "Certis traveile of the prechour or name of havng a good witt shulde not be the ende of preching, but profit to the soule of the peple; and however this ende cometh beste, is moost plesing to God. And curiouse preching of Latyn is ful fer fro this ende; for many men prechen hemsilf, and leeve to preche Jesus Crist; and so sermons done lesse good than thei diden in meke tyme".<sup>3</sup> "Iche preste ande deken is holden by the ordynance of Jesus Criste for to preche tho gospel to Cristen peple, bothe by ensample of holy lyfe, and faithful ande sadde techynge, ande willefully suffer tribulacion therefore --- In the olde law dekenys crieden tho commaundments of God, ande in tho newe lawe thai preached tho gospel, as Seint Steven and other. Also in tho olde lawe bothe Cristen kyngus and hethen, as Josias, Nabugodonoser, and other, prechiden God ande his myraclis; myche more prestis, aungelis of God by her office, as God seis by tho prophete Malachie, schulde preche tho gospel. Ande Crist bad his disciplis preche tho gospel to iche creature; and by tho same gospel that prestis have autorite for to make tho sacrament of tho auter, that is verrey Cristis body, by tho same gosselle han prestis autorite for to preche".<sup>4</sup> "Crist hadden custom for to preche on Saturday, as Luk seith here; and so shulden preestis sue him, preching on Sabot that is

1. Sermon CXXXIII, Arnold, Select English Works, II, 18.

2. Sermon LXXV, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 247.

3. Sermon CXXXIII, Arnold, Select English Works, II, 19.

4. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 464.

Sundai".<sup>1</sup>

In the Bible Wyclif found not only his standard of truth, and his commission to preach, but also example and inspiration to stand boldly for the truth, against all earthly authority and even unto death if necessary. He found that Christ himself and the apostles had been accused of heresy and persecuted by the hierarchy of their day. "And he showeth everywhere that all men should do penance, and hereof the clerks of the law have great need, which have been ever against God the Lord, both in the old law and in the new, to slay the prophets that speak to them the word of God. See ye that they spared not the Son of God, when the temporal judge would have delivered him, Matt. xxvii, and so forth of the apostles and martyrs that have spoken truly the word of God to them".<sup>2</sup> "If we hope to be rewarded in this life --- our hope of heavenly bliss perisheth. --- Christ came into the world to bear witness to the truth, and to enlighten the world. And as Christ, God and man, came hither with this intent, should not the truth keep his disciples while standing thus for its defense, labouring even unto death? Christ and the Baptist, and many more had not their reward here for doing this, but in heaven they have bliss hidden from men".<sup>3</sup> The importance of Wyclif's ideas about preaching and of his organization of the poor preachers to carry the simple gospel of the Bible direct to the people can not be overemphasized. This together with the fact that much of his attack was against the political organization and encroachments of the church, prevented the influence of his teachings from being confined to the

1. Arnold, Select English Works, II, 17.

2. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 156.

3. MS. Homilies. Bib. Reg. British Museum. Quoted from Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xcii, xciii.

academic halls of Oxford, and caused them to become a powerful leaven working among the people.

4. TEACHINGS AGAINST TEMPORAL POWER OF THE CLERGY.

a. CLERGY URGED TO DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO THEIR SPIRITUAL OFFICE.

Wyclif's writings abound in attacks on the immorality of the clergy and ecclesiastical abuses of different kinds. He was fully aware of the reason for their opposition to the simple preaching of the Gospel and the study of Christ's teachings and example. He wrote, "worldly prestis for their pride and covetise willen nout suffer Gods aungelis to do his message, leste their heresie, simony, and cursidnes were knowen".<sup>1</sup> But his attack upon the system was far deeper than simply invective against certain things recognized by all thinking people as evils. He attacked the whole idea of temporal power being held in the hands of the hierarchy. He urged that the clergy be not permitted to hold secular office,<sup>2</sup> and that, from the pope down, they devote themselves to their spiritual office, as they should. He strongly advocated the disendowment of the church, seeing no reason why the church should be heavily endowed and possessed with temporal estates and dominion, in addition to receiving tithes and taxes. The following quotations illustrate all these views, and show how he based them on the Bible. It was, above everything else, the great contrast between the humility, poverty, and spiritual purpose of Christ and the pride, wealth, and worldliness, of life and ambition, of the clergy, which caused him to feel strongly that the church was in great need of

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 465.  
2. Cf. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxvii.

reform in this respect. He believed that temporal dominion and unnecessarily heavy endowment of the church were largely responsible for the moral condition of the clergy and their perversion from the true purpose of their spiritual calling.

"Opyn techynge and Goddis lawe, old and newe, opyn ensauple of Cristis lif and his glorious apostlis, and love of God, drede of peynes and Goddis curs, and hope of grete reward in the blisse of hevene schulde stir alle prestis and religious to lyve in grete mekenesse and wilful povert of the gospel and discrete penaunce, and traveile to stoppe pride, coveitise, and fleischly lustis, and ydilnesse of worldly men, and renne faste to hevene by right weie of Goddis comaundementis".<sup>1</sup> "For greatness of Christ's vicars is not measured by worldly greatness, but by this, that this vicar follows more Christ by virtuous living; for thus teaches the gospel. --- Christ for time that he walked here was most poor man of all, both in spirit and in possessions, for Christ says that he had nought for to rest his head on. --- Of this I take a wholesome counsel, that the pope leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ gave him, for thus did Christ, and taught thus his disciples, till the fend had blinded this world".<sup>2</sup> "Allas! how durne worldly prestis take so grete lordschipe upon hem, sithen Crist so playnly forbedus hit, ande tellis by his owne ensaumpul tho seryyse and mekenys of hem? --- Yit, sithen Cristis apostilis, freschly fulfillid with wisdom, strenght, and charite of the Holy Gost, wolden nout be occupide aboute money redy at ther fete, for to dele hit to pore men there redy, but gave hem to prechynge of Gods worde and prayere, as

1. 'Church temporalities', Arnold, Select English Works, III, 215.

2. Letter to Pope Urban VI, Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 48.

holy writte wittenessis, what blyndenes of covetise stiris these ydiotis, unmyghtty and fer lowere in charite, to marre hem with so myche drit, more then alle Cristis apostilis dursten?"<sup>1</sup>

"The disciples of Christ have no power to exact by civil compulsion, temporalities by censures; as is plain from Scripture, Luke xxii., where Christ forbade his apostles to reign civilly, or to exercise any temporal dominion. The kings of the Gentiles, says he, exercise lordship over them, but ye shall not be so".<sup>2</sup>

"Sees inwardely, alle ye Cristen pepul, tho meke life of Jesus Crist, pore and symple to the worlde, and ful of brennyng charite, and puttyng hym selfe to penaunce and travayle in prechyng and prayyng, and willeful schedyng of his precious blode, for to make pes and charite and for to save mennes soules. Ande sees ye tho open lyif of popes, how proude thai bene, that Cristen kyngus schal kysse ther fete, --- And loke whether this be contrarie to Cristis mekenes, that weysche his disciplis feete, and coome not for to be served but to serve other men, and to gif hys lyif for redempcioune of mony. --- Where he was moste bisye in spirituale occupacione, these popis bene most bisy in delyng of beneficis to hem that moste muck bryngen or worldly favour. Where Criste willefully gafe tribute to the emperoure, these popis robben Cristis rewmes by tho furste frutes of mony thowsande poundis --- Where Crist gafe his precious blode and lyif for to make pes and charite, these popis maken and mayntenys werre thoroweout Cristendame, for to hold ther worldly state, moste contrarie ageyne Crist and his apostlis, and herto spenden tho almes of kyngis, and oppresen

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 476, 478.  
2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xlvi.

Cristen rewmes by newe subsidies. --- And trewly, if thai be thus contrary to Crist in lyvyng and techyng, as her open dedis and the world crien, thai ben cursid heretikis, manuellars bodily and gostly, Anticristis, and Sathanas transfigurid into aungelis (of) light. --- certes no man is verrey pope but in als myche as he sewis Crist; and in so myche Cristen men wole do aftur hym, ande no more, for alle bulles and censuris, for no creature of God".<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament is also called upon to bear witness against the holding of temporal dominion by the hierarchy. "The first boke of holy writte spekes even thus:- God seide to Aaron and prestes of his sorte, In the londe that ye dwelle inne schal ye noght have, ne ye schal have no part of hor heritage, for God is part and heritage of alle his prestes. Bot Levy childer gaf I alle tho tythes that comen of Israel to her owne possessioun, for hor bisye servise that thei served me in the tabernacle, as I ordeyned hom. Lord! if prestis by a worde of God taken gredily hor tythes, why schulde thei not, by another worde of God, kepe hom fro the lordschippe?".<sup>2</sup> He also argued from similar passages in "tho fyfft boke that is of Gods lawe" and from "Ezechiel", and asked, "O if God so scharply biddes these negatives, and Crist hymself kept hom straytely in his persoun, who are more heretikes then these that done hit ageynes hym?".<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the apostles and those that follow them, he said, "Thei stryven not for mannis choise, ne for jurisdiccoun, for yit was not the Churche dowid, for to take thes worldli goodis, but for to take mede of Crist for good kepinge of his Chirche".<sup>3</sup>

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 457-459.

2. Ibid. 234.

3. Sermon LXXIX, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 265.

b. WYCLIF'S VIEWS CONCERNING TITHES.

Although Wyclif urged the disendowment of the church, and that first fruits and various taxes be stopped, he recognized that the church must be supported, and therefore was not opposed to the payment of tithes. But he believed that they should be given as freewill offerings, and should never be raised by force. He also held that they should be given only to priests who merited them by righteous lives and faithful performance of the duties of their office, and that rather than to give them to support faithless priests in lives of idleness and wickedness it were better to use one's own discretion in distributing it to the poor. The priests should, like the apostles, be satisfied with food and clothing and a comfortable livelihood, and devote their attention to the teaching and spiritual care of their flocks. "Thus shulden rewmes stoppe first fruytes, and avauncing of Cardinalis, with other spoilingis of this court, bi the which rewmes and peplis ben chargid".<sup>1</sup> "By God and his laws curates be michel more bound to teach their subjects charitably the Gospel and Gods hests, both by open preaching and ensample of good life for to save their souls, than their subjects be holden to pay them tithes and offerings: --- if curates do not their office in word and in example --- their subjects be not bound to pay them tithes and offerings, since the principal cause for which tithes and offerings should be paid is away, the paying of tithes should cease".<sup>2</sup> "Also commonly such churches be appropred by simony, as they know better themselves, paying a great sum of money for such

1. Sermon LXXV, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 248.  
2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 268.

appropriation, if the benefice be fat. But what man led by reason and good conscience should pay to such religious men tithes and offerings gotten by falseness, leasings, and simony?"<sup>1</sup> After speaking of Eli's sons taking their portion by force, he said, "the things that be due to priests, should not be axed by strength, by violence or cursing, but be youen freely without exaction or constraining: and if the priest be reprov'd of God for his sins, he should be put out of his office, and the sacrifices should not be youen to him, but taken from him, as God commandeth from the high-priest Eli; and another true man walking in God's ways, as Samuel did, should be ordained to receive such sacrifices".<sup>2</sup> "Also St. Paul speaking to Timothy bishop, saith thus; Be we pay with these things, if we have lifelode, and to be hiled with. --- Whereof it sueth plainly, that not only simple priests and curates, but also sovereign curates, as bishops, should not ask their subjects by constraining more than lifelode and hiling, when they do away all manner waste both of money, and worldly array. Also Christ and his apostles lived most poor life, as it is known by all the process of the Gospel, nothing challenging by exactions nor constraining, but lived simply and scarcely enough of alms freely, and wilfully youen; therefore they that pretend them to be principal followers of Christ's steps, should walk as Christ did, and so lead full poor life taking of things freely youen as much as need is, for their ghostly office and no more, and there with be apaid".<sup>3</sup>

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 268.
2. Ibid. 266.
3. Ibid. 267.

c. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CIVIL LORDS.

Wyclif went further than simply urging the disendowment of the church. He taught that it was the right and under certain circumstances the duty of the civil lords to take away property from the church, and that it was also their duty to enforce among the clergy a type of life befitting their holy office. The church was not the private domain of the hierarchy to mismanage as they pleased, but the civil rulers were also responsible for its welfare. It will be noticed that he based these views also on the Bible. He urged "lordis to compelle clerkis to this holy lif of Crist and his apostlis".<sup>1</sup> "Kyngis and lordis schulden wite that thei ben mynystris and vikeris of God, to venge synne and ponysche mysdoeris, and preise goode doeris, as Petir and Poul techen. --- the kyng and lordis --- amende the clergie, and turnen here temporalities into seculer mennis hondis".<sup>2</sup> "And not al oonli siche preestis have keping of Cristis Chirche, but kingis and princis of this world".<sup>3</sup> "It is lawful for kings, in cases limited by law, to take away the temporalities from churchmen who habitually abuse them".<sup>4</sup> His ideas on this subject are expressed in a passage in which he suggested that the reform ought logically to begin at Rome, though he does not seem to have been hopeful that it would come from that quarter; "sith the nest and heed thereof is at Rome, where it bigan, it semeth to many men that at Rome shulde this rightting bigynne; --- bothe lordis and comuns mai lette freris to harmen the Chirche. --- For if richesse and worldli lordship weren taken aweie from prelates and preestis, moche of the fendis pride were abatid in

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 213.

2. Ibid. 214, 217.

3. Sermon LXXIX, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 265.

4. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xlviil.

thes clerkes; and Goddis name were not dispisid ech dai as it is now, but his lawe shulde be betere holde, and Anticristis judgementis shulde ceesse".<sup>1</sup> "Secular lords may lawfully and medefully take away temporal goods youen to men of the church; --- For the chief lordship in this land of all temporalities, both of secular men and religious, pertain to the king of his general governing; for else he were not king of England, but of a little part thereof. Therefore the men that busien them to take away this lordship from the king, as do friars --- in this point be sharper enemies and traitors than Frenchmen and all other nations. Also it pertaineth to the king, the while any bishop or abbot's see is void, to have in his hand all temporalities, and at his own will to youe them to prelates; therefore the king may take away these temporalities from prelates, when lawful cause exciteth. --- And so Saint Paul teacheth that each man be subject to their potestates, ---All this saith St. Paul --- that clerks owen to be subject of need to the king's power. --- therefore secular lords do this rightfully, since this is done by commandment of the apostle, and by ordinance of God, and therefore it is plain of these reasons and authorities, and secular lords may levemently and medefully, in many cases taken away temporal goods given to men of the church".<sup>2</sup> This passage illustrates the interesting mixture of patriotic and Scriptural reasons for some of Wyclif's views.

1. Sermon LXXV, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 246.  
2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 264-266.

5. TEACHINGS AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL SUPREMACY  
OF THE POPE AND HIERARCHY.

a. THE POPE'S AUTHORITY LIMITED.

"The ecclesiastical supremacy was gradually interpreted to mean that the Bishop of Rome was the one or universal bishop in whom all spiritual and ecclesiastical powers were summed up, and that all other members of the hierarchy were simply delegates selected by him for the purposes of administration. --- It was part of the Pope's claim to spiritual supremacy that his subjects (the clergy) owed no allegiance to the monarch within whose territories they resided".<sup>1</sup> Wyclif's views on this subject have already been noted in connection with his attack on the temporal power of the papacy, but he went further and directly attacked the spiritual supremacy of the pope and hierarchy from several different angles. In this also he was preparing for the Reformation, for as Fisher says, "the Reformation was a rejection of papal and priestly authority".<sup>2</sup> Wyclif's chief attack against papal supremacy and infallibility was an inevitable corollary of his belief in the primacy of Christ and his Gospel. The pope's life and teachings were to be followed only so far as they were in accord with the teachings of Christ. His bulls and decrees were of no effect and were to be ignored by true Christians, except so far as they were supported by the authority of Scripture. In the loose sense in which he called even civil rulers vicars, he did not hesitate to call the pope one of the vicars of Christ, but he distinctly declared even in his letter to Pope Urban VI. that the pope's authority was limited by the will of Christ. "No pope may make lawfully

1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 7, 8.

2. Fisher, The Reformation, 11.

ony lawe contrary to tho gospel, ne superflue, ne by his lawes  
with-drawe men fro studyng ne keyynge holy writte, ne sette more  
bisynes ne prys by suche newe lawis then by tho gospel of Jhesu  
Criste. --- And no man schulde receyve suche lawes, nouthur for  
lyfe ne dethe".<sup>1</sup> "Also the pope may dispense with the rule of  
each private sect or religion, --- but he may not dispense with  
Christ's rule, youen to apostles".<sup>2</sup> Writing to the pope he  
said, "I suppose over this that the pope be most obliged to the  
keeping of the gospel among all men that live here. For the pope  
is the highest vicar that Christ has here in earth. --- And over  
this, I take as belief that no man should follow the pope, nor no  
saint that is now in heaven, but inasmuch as he followed Christ,  
for James and John erred, and Peter and Paul sinned". He said,  
further, that if the pope does "contrary to Christ's will"  
"he is an open antichrist. And merciful intent excused not Peter,  
that Christ called him Satan; so blind intent and wicked counsel  
excuses not the pope here".<sup>3</sup> "Whatever pope or other preste,  
in maner of lyvyng or techyng or lawis-makyng, contrarius  
Crist, is verrey Anticrist, adversary of Jesus Crist and of his  
apostlis, ande of alle Cristen pepul".<sup>4</sup>

b. PAPAL CENSURES OF NO EFFECT UNLESS DESERVED.

Wyclif boldly declared that the censures of pope or prelate  
could harm no man, and were of no authority, unless they were  
deserved and were in accord with God's law. "We ought to believe  
that then only does a Christian priest bind or loose, when he  
simply obeys the law of Christ".<sup>5</sup> "We know that it is not

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 460.
2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 261.
3. Letter to Urban VI. Religious Tract Society, Writings  
of John Wicliff, 48.
4. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 457.
5. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xlv, xlvi.

possible that the vicar of Christ, merely by his bulls, or by them together with his own will and consent, and that of his college of cardinals, can qualify or disable any man. This is plain from the Catholic faith; since it behoves our Lord in every vicarious operation to maintain the primacy. Therefore, as in every qualifying of a subject, it is first required that the subject to be qualified, be meet and worthy; so in every disqualification there is first required a deserving from some demerit of the person thus disqualified, and, by consequence, such qualifying or disqualifying is not made purely by the ministry of the vicar of Christ".<sup>1</sup> "Here Cristen men witnessen hardily that no wrongeful curse of ony prelate in erthe byndis anentys God. But when thai cursen wrongefully, stondynge pacience and charite in hym that is cursid of hem, he is blessed of Almyghtty God in Trinite and alle his seintis. And no creature of God may harme this mannes soule --- Ffor no faithful Cristen man may withdraw charitable commynng and helpe in Gods cause for blaspheme letters of covetouse prelatis, when he knowis no notable defaute in his brother, but perceyves pleyne treuth and gode resoun, that his brother spekis and mayntenys. Therefore no trewe Cristen man schortly wil renne into Goddis curse for a blaste of Sathanas, ne for worldly thanke and flaterynng of Anticristis clerkis".<sup>2</sup>

c. THE POPE A SINNER.

One form in which Wyclif waged his attack against the spiritual supremacy of the pope was his insistence that the pope was a 'peccable brother', liable to sin and subject to reproof.

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xlv, xlvi.
2. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 465, 466.

"Christ is the supreme Lord, while the pope is a man liable to sin; and if in mortal sin, according to divines, is unfitted for dominion".<sup>1</sup> An interesting passage in his paper presented at Lambeth seems to indicate that the great scholar and reformer was capable of using ironical humor even in defending himself against charges of heresy. "An ecclesiastic, even the pope of Rome himself, may, on some accounts, be corrected by their subjects, and for the benefit of the church be impleaded by both clergy and laity. This is plain from hence, that the pope is capable of sinning, --- And since he is our peccable brother, or liable to sin as well as we, he is subject to the law of brotherly reproof; and when, therefore it is plain that the whole college of cardinals is remiss in correcting him for the necessary welfare of the church, it is evident that the rest of the body, which, as it may chance, may chiefly be made up of the laity, may medicinally reprove him and implead him, and reduce him to live a better life. This possible case is handled, Diss.40, si papa fuerit a fide devius. For as so great a lapse ought not to be supposed in the lord pope without manifest evidence; so it ought not to be presumed possible that when he does so fall, he should be guilty of so great obstinacy as not humbly to accept a cure from his superior with respect to God. Wherefore many chronicles attest the facts of that conclusion. God forbid that the truth should be condemned by the church of Christ, because it sounds ill in the ears of sinners and ignorant persons; for then the whole faith of the Scriptures would be liable to be condemned".<sup>2</sup> Wyclif's belief that even a layman, who truly and faithfully served God, was a sinful pope's 'superior with respect

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xxii.

2. Ibid. xlviii, xlix.

to God' was hardly in line with the mediaeval idea of the spiritual supremacy of the pope.

d. PARITY OF THE CLERGY.

Wyclif proclaimed the dignity of even the humblest minister who faithfully performed the duties of his office. The phrase 'parity of the clergy' had not yet come into use, but it is evident from his writings that he was opposed to the great number and unscriptural diversity of offices in the hierarchy and the limitations placed upon the functions of the lower clergy. "It is holden a great grace to be a pope or other prelate; but it is a thousand fold more grace to be a minister as Christ hath ordained, for the gain is more, and the service more holy. For since the new testament is the last law of God, and bringeth men next to heaven; these ministers bring men by grace that God himself giveth, and worketh thus with these ministers. And this is a fit and a high service that priests should have; but if they keep not well this office, none are fouler traitors than they".<sup>1</sup> "Every priest rightly ordained, (according to the law of grace) hath a power according to which he may minister all the sacraments".<sup>2</sup> "This oneness of priesthood in the church, and the consequent right of the humblest priest to be occupied in the discharge of every priestly function, the Reformer always maintained. Hence he censured the practice of restricting confirmation to the office of the bishop".<sup>3</sup>

1. Sermon XLII, Arnold, Select English Works, II, 342, 343. Quotation from Writings of John Wickliff, 221.
2. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, xlvii.
3. Ibid. xlvi.

e. IMPORTANCE OF THE LAITY.

Wyclif's thought of the church was very different from the conception of it as the "Pope's House"<sup>1</sup> or as consisting of the hierarchy. His remark, just quoted, that the church "as it may chance, may chiefly be made up of the laity" is typical of his emphasis upon the importance of the laity in the church. In analysing the different parts of the church, after mentioning those in heaven, and in purgatory, he said, "The thridde part of the Chirche ben trewe men that here lyven, that schulen be aftir saved in hevene, and lyven here Cristen mennis liif".<sup>2</sup> His opposition to the spiritual supremacy of the priestly caste is illustrated by his enunciation of the truly Protestant doctrine of the individual right of private interpretation of Scripture. He wrote, "It is all one to condemn the word of God in any language for heresy, and God for an heretic, who spoke the word. For he and his word are all one, and they may not be separated; and if the word of him be the life of the world, as it is written, Not only by bread liveth man, but in every word that cometh out of the mouth of God, Matt iv. and every word of God is the life of the soul of man, as saith St. John, thou hast anointing of the Holy Ghost, and thou hast no need of any man to teach you in all things which is his blessed word, in which is all wisdom and knowledge, and yet ye are always to learn as well as we".<sup>3</sup> He also proclaimed the right of the individual, even one who had already taken the vows of a monastic order, to follow Christ and the apostles according to his own conscience, without priestly interference or bondage to erroneous monastic rules. "It is

1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 194.

2. 'The Church and her Members', Arnold, Select English Works, III, 339.

3. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 157.

leaveful to each man or person of this singular religion and profession, to leave it cleave fast to the rule of Jesus Christ, as more perfect. --- a man may lawfully, yea, against his sovereign's will, go from the less perfect religion, to the more perfect".<sup>1</sup> The following passage illustrates several of Wyclif's arguments already mentioned, and clearly shows his idea of the importance of the laity, the necessity of faith in the heart of the individual believer, and the direct responsibility of the individual to God. "They ought wholly to regulate themselves conformably to the law of Christ. Nor are those heretics to be heard who fancy that seculars ought not to know the law of God, but that it is sufficient for them to know what the priests and prelates tell them by word of mouth; for the Scripture is the faith of the church, and the more it is known in an orthodox sense the better. Therefore as secular men ought to know the faith, so it is to be taught to them in whatsoever language is best known to them. --- seeing, if one may say so, that there are many prelates who are too ignorant of the Scripture, and others conceal points of Scripture, --- Besides, according to the faith taught by the apostle, Heb.xi., the saints by faith overcame kingdoms, and by the motive of faith chiefly hastened to their own country. --- The laws, therefore, which the prelates make, are not to be received as matters of faith, nor are we to believe their words or discourses any further or otherwise than they are founded in the Scripture, since, according to the constant doctrine of Augustine, the Scripture is all the truth. --- Further, prelates, as the pope, or friars,

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 260.

and other means, may prove defective, --- Besides, since, according to the faith which the apostle teaches, all Christians must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and be answerable to him for all the goods with which he has intrusted them, it is necessary that the faithful should know what these goods are, and the uses of them; for an answer by a prelate or attorney will not then avail, but everyone must then answer in his own person. Since, therefore, God has given to both clergy and laity the knowledge of the faith," etc.<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on the direct responsibility of the individual to God, and the complete absence of any idea of the necessity of a mediatorial priesthood, strongly imply what Lindsay calls "The distinctively Protestant conception of the spiritual priesthood of all believers",<sup>2</sup> which, a century and a half later, was the one point that made it impossible for the Romanist and Protestant theologians to agree upon the Augsburg Confession.<sup>2</sup> This doctrine comes very near to actual statement in a passage in which Wyclif discussed the power to bind and loose on earth; "And thes wordis weren not oonli seid unto Petre, but comunli to the apostlis, as the gospel tellith after, and, in persones of the apostlis weren thei seid to prestis, and, as many men thenken, to alle Cristen men. For, if man have mercy on his soule, and unbinde it, or binde, God bi his jugement in hevene jugith the soule sich".<sup>3</sup> Indirect phrases, such as "as many men thenken", were frequently used by Wyclif to state his own opinion. The following quotations are pertinent here as they strongly repudiate the necessity of a mediatorial priesthood between the soul of the

1. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, lxii, lxiii.

2. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 365.

3. Sermon C. Arnold, Select English Works, I, 350.

believer and God. "Therefore iche man do verrey penaunce for his synnes, kepe Goddis hestis, ande do werkis of charite, ande ye shul have parte of alle Gods dedis in al holy Chirche, als myche as Gods mercye and rightwiseness wille, thof alle popis ande her bullis were fynally laide to slepe".<sup>1</sup> "Here Cristen men seyne boldily, that verrey contricioun of hert, that is never withouten speciale grace of God and charite, does away alle synnes bifore done of that man that is verrey contrite, thof alle prestus nowe in erthe were unborne. Ande withouten verrey contricione is no remissione of synne, what ever men blabiren".<sup>2</sup>

## 6. TEACHINGS CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT.

### a. WYCLIF'S DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1688  
1  
"The policy of the Church lodged all government in the hands of a superior class, the priesthood, who were the commissioned, indispensable almoners of divine grace. The worship centered in the sacrifice of the mass, a constantly repeated miracle wrought by the hands of the priest. In the idea of the Christian life, the visable act was made to count for so much, ceremonies were so multiplied and so highly valued, that a character of externality was stamped upon the method of salvation".<sup>3</sup>

A discussion of Wyclif's teachings against transubstantiation, therefore, should logically form part of the larger subject of his attack upon the spiritual supremacy of the hierarchy; but due to its importance in the work of Wyclif, as also in the history of the Reformation, it has been treated in a separate sub-section. Wyclif recognized that the doctrine of transub-

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 460.

2. Ibid. 461.

3. Fisher, The Reformation, 43.

stantiation was of late origin and a perversion of the pristine doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Like all the later reformers he utterly repudiated the idea of a repeated miracle and sacrifice. The idea of Christ's body being made by a sinful priest, and adored by the people, was to him, also, blasphemous and idolatrous. Although he attacked with especial vigor the errors connected with this sacrament, there is evidence in his writings that he too felt that the church through the centuries had acquired more sacraments than could be justified from the Scriptures. He wrote, "For the lawe that Crist hath goven --- were ynough to governe his Chirche withouten lawis now maad. And office for to preche the gospel, with few other sacraments, weren service light and ynough --- and this diden Petre and Poule and other apostlis everychon".<sup>1</sup> Wyclif taught that the bread in the sacrament remained true bread, and was also the Body of Christ in a true, though spiritual, sense.

He urged that "Cristis techinge and bileve of the sacrament of his owne body, that is pleyedly taught by Crist and his apostelis in gossellis and pistillis, may be taught openly in chirchis to Cristen puple, and the contrarie techinge and fals bileve, brought up by cursed ypocritis and heretikus and worldly prestis, unkunynge in Goddis lawe, distried. The false feith taught of Anticrist and of his false cusede disciplis --- is neither groundid in holy writt ne reson ne wit, ne taughte bi the moste wiseste old seyntis, but only by newe ypocritis and cursed heretics, that magnifyen here owen fantasies and dremes, and feyned power and myracles, more than Cristis techynge and his apostlis, --- The rightte feith of

1. Arnold, Select English Works, I, 265.

Cristen men is this; that this worshipful sacrament is bred and Cristis body; as Jesus Crist is verrey God and verrey man. And this feith is groundid in Cristis owen word, in the gospel of Seynt Mattheu, Mark, Luk, and bi Seynt Poul, and pleynty in holy writt,--- And herein accordeth reason and witt at the fulle. In thes gossellis is the forme taught of Crist, that oure Lord Jesus Crist --- commaundid hem to don this sacrament in mynde of hym. And Seynt Poul, that hadde his gospel not bi men but bi revelacion of Jesus Crist, seith thus in his firste pistel to the Coryntheis, Ne is not the bred that we breken the comunyng of oure Lordis body? And certis he undirstondith that it is so, aftir the speche of holi writt. Thereforu in the same pistel to the Coryntheis, aftir the forme of consecracion he clepith thre tymes this sacrament bred. --- And if it be nede that this sacrament be halwid visibely, neveretheles it is nedeful that it be understonden unvesibily. --- Thanne, sith thes auctorites of Crist and his apostles ben algatis sothe, and also auctorities of thes seyntis and clerkis, sith thei accorden with holy writt and reson, seie we that this sacrament is verrey bred, and also verrey Cristis body, and teche we this treue bileve to Cristen men opynly".<sup>1</sup> In the above passage Christ and Paul are quoted to show that the purpose of the sacrament is communion and commemoration rather than a repeated sacrifice. The following is even more definite on this point; "a sacrament is no more to say but a sign or mind of a thing past, or a thing to come; for --- Jesus spake of the bread, and said to his disciples, Luke xxii. As ye do this thing, do it in mind of me".<sup>2</sup>

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 520-22.

2. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 163.

b. TRANSUBSTANTIATION IRRATIONAL.

Sometimes Wyclif argued from the irrationality of the mediaeval doctrine, as when he wrote "if the manhood of Crist were increased every day by so much as the bread and wine draweth to that ye minister, he should increase more in one day by cartloads than he did in thirty-two years when he was here in earth".<sup>1</sup> Also he argued, "ye say, that there is left no bread, but it is the body of the Lord. --- if ye say it is so - then thou must needs consent that the thing which is not God to-day shall be God to-morrow; yea, and that thing which is without spirit of life, but groweth in the field by kind, shall be God at another time".<sup>1</sup>

c. TRANSUBSTANTIATION UNSCRIPTURAL.

Usually, however, he based his attack directly upon the Scriptures, showing that the doctrine of transubstantiation was without Scriptural basis and was polytheistic and idolatrous. "And most of all they make us believe a false law that they have made upon the sacred host, for the most false belief is taught in it. For where find ye that ever Christ, or any of his disciples or apostles, taught any man to worship it? --- The Father is unmade, the Son is unmade, the Holy Ghost is unmade. And thou then that art an earthly man, by what reason mayest thou say that thou makest thy Maker? Whether may the thing that is made say to the maker, Why hast thou made me thus? Or may it turn again and make him that made it? Surely not".<sup>2</sup> "And we may not see him bodily, being in this life, as it is written Peter 1. For he sayeth, Whom ye have not ye love,

1. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 160.  
2. Ibid. 157.

into whom ye now not seeing believe. And John saith in the first chapter of his gospel, No man saw God; none but the only begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father, he hath told it out. And John saith in his first epistle, the third chapter, Every man that sinneth seeth not him, neither knoweth him. By what reason then say ye that are sinners, that ye make God?"<sup>1</sup> "For in all the holy scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Apocalypse, there are no words written of the making of Christ's body; but there are written that Christ was the son of the Father, and that he was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and that he took flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, and that he was dead, and that he rose again from death, on the third day, and that he ascended to Heaven very God and man, and that we should believe in all scriptures that are written of him --- but where find ye that ever Christ or any of his disciples taught any man to worship this bread or wine?"<sup>2</sup> Wyclif reasoned from Christ's statement, 'I am the true vine', that it was not necessary to take literally his statement, 'This is my body'. This argument is of especial interest as it is the identical reasoning used a century and a half later by the reformer Zwingli.<sup>3</sup> "Christ saith, John xv. I am a very vine; wherefore then worship ye not the vine for God, as ye do the bread? Wherein was Christ a very vine, or wherein was the bread Christ's body, in figurative speech, which is hidden to the understanding of sinners? Then if Christ became not a material, or earthly vine, neither did a material vine become the body of Christ. So neither the bread, material bread,

1. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 164, 165.

2. Ibid. 161, 162.

3. Cf. Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, 308.

was changed from its substance to the flesh and blood of Christ".<sup>1</sup>

d. GRACE RECEIVED BY FAITH.

It has already been noted that Wyclif repudiated the idea that a mediatorial priesthood was necessary for salvation. He clearly taught that salvation was quite independent of the priest, being the free gift of God direct to the believer, and that grace was received in the sacrament by faith, and not *opus operatum*, the automatic result of a miracle performed by the priest. He wrote, "Bot a mon may have tho sacrament of tho auter, that is verrey Gods body, in his mouthe, and streyght fle to helle withouten ende, and tho more be dampned for tho yvel takynge of this sacrament".<sup>2</sup> "And no doute Cristen men myghtten be saved by that feith that Criste taught in kepyng of his hestis, thof thai be not chargid iche yere with newe articlis of bileve and newe servyce, for tho olde that God ordeyned is ynoghye".<sup>3</sup> "And if we have sinned ever so much, and ever so long have laid in sin, ask we God for mercy in our thoughts, and have we sorrow for this sin; and God is ready to forgive it, however priests fail. --- What should move men to despair, since they may so easily be saved?".<sup>4</sup> Thus we see that Wyclif had a knowledge of the truth, which might have saved Martin Luther years of anguish, had he learned it earlier.

7. TEACHINGS AGAINST MISCELLANEOUS ABUSES.

a. CELIBACY.

In addition to the attacks upon the great errors already mentioned, it is interesting to notice that Wyclif opposed, with

1. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 166.
2. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 382, 383.
3. Ibid. 467.
4. Sermon LXXXII. Arnold, Select English Works, I, 278.  
Quoted from Writings of John Wickliff, 239.

greater or less zeal, almost all those abuses which later were swept away wherever the Reformation became established. "Almost every distinguishing feature of the mediaeval and papal church, as contrasted with the Protestant, is directly disowned and combated by Wickliffe"<sup>1</sup>. Thus Wyclif opposed the practice of enforced celibacy of the clergy, and based his attack against this and other ascetic mediaeval ideas directly on the Bible. "Here mai men douten, and trete of the staat and liif of prestis; how they ben dowid and wyflees agens Goddis autorite; for Crist forfendid dowyng both in him and in hise apostlis, and approvede wedding in apostlis and many other"<sup>2</sup>. "And for that God hymself made this ordre of matrimoyne, and he not so made thes newe religions, it is betre and more to preise than thes newe ordris. Also the Holy Gost warneth Cristen men, hou in the laste daies summe heretikis schullen departe fro feith of Goddis lawe, geving entente to spiritis of error, and to techyng of develis, spekyng lesyngis in ypocrisie, forbedyng men and wymmen to be wedded, and techyng men to abstene hem fro metis, the whiche God hath maad to be eten of trewe men, with thankyngis and heriyng of God. --- And therfore he that forbedith or letiith verrey matrimoyne, is enemye of God and seyntis in hevne and alle mankynde. --- And herefore, sith fornicacioun is so perilous, and men and wymmen ben so frele, God ordeynede prestis in the olde lawe to have wyves, and nevere forbode it in the newe lawe, neither bi Crist ne bi his apostlis, but rathere aprovede it. But now, bi ypocrisie of fendis and fals men, manye bynden hem to presthod and chastite, and forsaken wifis bi Goddis lawe,

1. Fisher, The Reformation, 50.

2. Sermon CV. Arnold, Select English Works, I, 364.

and schenden maydenes and wifis, and fallen foulest of alle".<sup>1</sup>

b. CONFESSION.

Wyclif often spoke disparagingly of confession and showed that he did not favor the prominence into which it had come in the practice of the church. Yet he did not absolutely oppose it, admitting that good might come from confessing to a good priest, but pointing out the great harm that might come from confessing to a priest of evil life, and from following his instructions. He wrote, "And so Christ speaketh here a word that should move men to stand with him. Each man that shall acknowledge me before men by both my natures, I shall acknowledge that man before my Father, to that man's honour. Here we shall understand that the confession Christ maketh here is not whispering in a priest's ear, to tell him the sins that we have done, but it is granting of truth, the which is openly said, with readiness to suffer therefore, whatever man denies it".<sup>2</sup> "And thus speaketh Christ, who is of more authority than all these popes that ordained confession and rowning".<sup>3</sup>

"Moreover confessione made by mouthe to a wise preste of lyvyng, that bothe can, and for grete charite techis tho treuthe of Gods dome, dos muche gode, and to suche hit spedis that men schewe hor lyif. And certis confessione <sup>made</sup> to a vicious preste, unknowinge holy writte, hauntyng his office fro worldly wyngyng more then for charite to save mennys soules, tho suyng of his counsel dos miche harme, and ledis mony soulis to helle --- Ande sithen these new lawus of confessioun done away tho liberte

1. 'Of weddid men and wifis', Arnold, Select English Works, III, 189, 190.
2. Sermon LXIII, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 195, 196. Quoted from Writings of John Wickliff, 235.
3. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wickliff, 229.

of Cristis gospel and resoun, and bene horde of synne, and mayntenyng of alle pride and cursidnes bothe of clerkis ande lewid men, hit is nede that men do verrey penaunce for her synnes, and triste to Cristis presthode that never may faile, and seke trewe prestis and witty of Gods wille, and do aftur hem in als muche as thai teche Goddis dome, and no ferther for no creature".<sup>1</sup> He did not condemn confession as such, but rather the laws making it obligatory, and the teaching that it, rather than true repentance and trust in Christ, was necessary for salvation.

c. ABSOLUTION AND INDULGENCES.

Wyclif also opposed the accepted practices of absolving and granting indulgences. Like Luther, whose attack against indulgences excluded those that were simply "a relaxation of ecclesiastical penalties"<sup>2</sup>, he opposed the idea that any man had authority by his own ipse dixit to absolve sins committed against God. He wrote, "it is knowen bi Goddis lawe that no pope assolith but in as myche as Crist assolith first. And herfore Seint Petre and other Cristis apostlis asoilliden not thus, ne gyve siche indulgencis; --- and no man may do synne, but if he synne agens him, and no synne may be forgovun but if God first forgyve it".<sup>3</sup> And again, "thai senden indulgencis, foundid as thai faynen on Cristis charite and his dethe, --- these indulgencis --- done mykel harme to Cristen soulis and sownen erreure ageynes tho gospel. Ffor Crist ne his apostlis never usid suche, and yit thai taughten al that was nedeful

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 461, 462.

2. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 219.

3. Sermon XLVII. Arnold, Select English Works, I, 136, 137.

for salvacioun of mennes soulis. --- Also tho pepul bileveth more to suche dede bullis then to Cristis gospel, for thai bileven to have more thonke of God for spendyng of ther money at the ordynaunce of the pope, then to spende hit on pore men as Crist biddis in the gospel. Yit these indulgencis bene fals, for so many thowsand of yeris as thai speken of schul never be bifore the day of dome, and after thai serven of nought. Also a synneful man in these indulgencis presumes more then Crist and his apostlis wroughten in erthe, and maken hem heygher then God. --- By thes bullis riche men drede nout to synne\* and miche wynnynge and worldly glory is gotten to worldly prelatis by hem".<sup>1</sup> This shows that Wyclif, like later reformers, objected to indulgences because of the pernicious effects they had on the morals of the people, as well as because they were not founded upon Scripture, and tended to pervert the true doctrine of salvation.

d. IMAGES.

Wyclif did not positively condemn the use of images, but warned against the danger of their being worshiped by the ignorant, and also against the wrong and unscriptural impression usually conveyed by them. "Who may see a greater abomination than to see the people lead away from God, and taught to worship for God that which is not God nor Savior of the World? --- And

\* "A simple fornicacioun,  
Twenty shillings he shall pay;  
And then have an absolucioun,  
And al the yere usen it forth he may!  
Thus they letten hem go a-stray,  
They recke nat though the soul be brend".

The Plowman's Tale, Skeat, Complete Works of  
Geoffrey Chaucer, VII, 168.

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 458-460.

again he saith, Ye shall not think that the living God is like to gold, silver, either anything graven or painted by craft, either taught of man".<sup>1</sup> Speaking of images, he wrote, "the lewid pepul honoris hem for God and seyntis, and done more honour to hem then to God and Cristis body. And as the nobul kyng Ezechye distroyed tho neddur of bras when the peple did ydolatrie therby, noutwithstondynge that that same serpent was made by Moyses at Gods biddynge, myche more these false ymagis made of synnefull men, sithen nouthur God, ne Crist by his monhede, gafe never commaundement to make these, ne counseile, ne his apostilis in al holy writte. --- Hit semes that this offrynge to ymagis is a sotile caste of Anticriste and his clerkis, for to drawe almes fro pore men, and cumber worldly prestis with muck, --- ymagis myghtten be sufferid for lewid men, in defaute of prechyng that prestis schulden do, notholes ymagis that representen pompe and glorie of tho worlde,- as if Criste hade bene crucified with golden clothis ande golden schone, and as hys pore apostilis hade lyved in worldely glory, and other seintes also, and herinne haden plesid God,- bene false ymages and bokis of heresy worthi to be destroyed".<sup>2</sup>

e. PRAYING FOR THOSE IN PURGATORY.

In Wyclif's belief in the existence of purgatory we may see evidence that he was not in every respect completely freed from the trammels of mediaeval thought. Yet even here his writings show that he differed widely from the views of the mediaeval church, in that he denounced the error of praying for those in purgatory. Describing the different parts of the

1. Religious Tract Society, Writings of John Wicliff, 156.  
2. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 462,463.

church, he said, "The secounde part of this Chirche ben seintis in purgatorie; and thes synnen not of the newe, but purgen ther olde synnes. And many errours fallen in preiying for thes seintis; and sith thei alle been deed in bodi, Cristis wordis may be taken of hem,- sue we Crist, in our life, and late the dede birie the dede".<sup>1</sup>

f. MARIOLATRY AND SAINT WORSHIP.

Perhaps even more striking examples of his partial bondage to mediaeval thought are found in his clinging to Mariolatry and his allowing, or even encouraging, praying to and worshiping the saints. He urged meekness "if thou wilt plese Marie",<sup>2</sup> and said, "Truste we unto wordis of the gospel, and worschipe we Jesus and Marie with alle oure might".<sup>3</sup> And also, he wrote, "Cristen men schulden worschipe tho holy Trinite and seintis, ande not these ymagis".<sup>4</sup> It has been pointed out that Wyclif's breaking away from the tenets of the mediaeval church was the result of a gradual process, and it may be that the above quotations do not represent his final views on these subjects. As the questions of Mariolatry and saint worship are closely connected with the mediaeval attitude towards Christ it is important to notice that Wyclif's views differed widely from this attitude in two respects. He unreservedly recognized Christ's place of preeminence in the church; and yet his attitude towards him entirely lacked that religion of fear which characterised his times. Hoare says, "The Virgin and the Saints, as being in nearer touch with man than the more

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 339.

2. Ibid. I, 356.

3. Ibid. III, 113.

4. Ibid. 462, 463.

awful personalities of the Trinity, were invited to perform what Holy Scripture had defined to be the mediatorial work of the Savior. The Bible, as the story of the redeeming love of a Father, had more and more faded out of view, while allegory and legend had substituted in its place a miscellany of Christianised mythology".<sup>1</sup> Lindsay says, "Christ fills the full sphere of God. That is the characteristic of Reformation thought and of Reformation piety, and appears everywhere in the writings of the Reformers".<sup>2</sup> This was also true of Wyclif. He taught that the Lord's Prayer "passith othere prayers in --- auctorite,- for Crist, bothe God and man, made it for Cristen men to usen it; and he is moost of auctorite, as oure bileve techith".<sup>3</sup> He also wrote, "our Lord Jesus Christ, very God and very man, is Head and Prelate of this religion".<sup>4</sup> The reader of this paper, whose patience has brought him thus far, could not have failed to notice the prominence of this thought in the teachings of Wyclif. But he represented him as a loving and merciful Savior, far different from the mediaeval conception of "the stern Judge who would convict and punish all those who had not secured righteousness by the intercession of the saints or by their own good works".<sup>5</sup> He wrote, "And so Crist prechide, to prisoneris forgyvng of her synnes, and to men blinde in wit, for to know the wille of God, and leeve broken men in forgyvenesse of ther travaile. And Crist prechide the yeer of our Lord that was acceptable bi him; for he made the year Jubile; and daie of gyvng of mercy and of blis was prechid of Crist.

1. Hoare, Evolution of the English Bible, 19.
2. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 475.
3. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 93.
4. Vaughan, Tracts and Treatises, 259.
5. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, I, 136.

And so alle these eight wordis sownen in mercy and comfort of Crist, to men that ben in prisoun here for olde synnes that thei have done".<sup>1</sup> "Come ye all to me, saith Christ, that travail and are charged, and I shall refresh you. Take ye my yoke upon you, and learn ye of me this lesson, that I am mild and meek of heart, and follow ye your Father in these, and then shall ye find rest to your souls in your travail. For my yoke is sweet, and my charge is light. And these words of Christ to comfort religious men, are better than all these new rules that are clouted on to Christ's words".<sup>2</sup> Finally, in connection with his attitude toward praying to the saints, it should be noted that even in passages in which he showed some dependence on mediaeval ideas, the chief purpose of his discourse was to show that it was better, and more to the point to pray directly to God our ever-loving Father. He wrote that "tho manner of prayyng that Crist taught, for to pray to God for hys worschippe to be encresid and for commyne profite of holy Chirche, is bettur than any other manere founden of synneful men for syngulere affeccione. Notholes men may wele pray to other seintis, that thai be meenys bytwixe Crist ande hem, in als muche as hit stiris hem to love more God, and no forther, so that thai know wele that no seint in heven may graunte any thinge, ne spedis, ne but as God grauntis hit furst --- Ande sithen God is moste myghtty for to helpe us, most witty in knowyng what is spedeful to us, and lovyng for to gyve us that us moste nedis and helpis, and no saint may do any thinge withouten his leeve, and he a thousande folde more redy to here and helpe then any creature, hit were no grete perile if we directenoure prayers to God

1. Sermon CXXXIII, Arnold, Select English Works, II, 18.  
2. Sermon CI, Arnold, Select English Works, I, 352, 353.  
Quoted from Writings of John Wickliff, 230.

onely, as Christ and his modur diden, and his apostilis, and  
taught us to do so".<sup>1</sup>

1. Arnold, Select English Works, III, 466,467.

CONCLUSION.

Wyclif has well been called the Morning Star of the Reformation. He found acquaintance with the Bible in England at a low ebb. He left the first complete translation of the Scriptures in the English language, a large body of sermons, tracts, and treatises, and a large group of followers enthusiastically spreading the knowledge of the Bible, and urging a return to the simple Gospel contained therein. Wyclif found in the Bible a guide for his faith and life, a touchstone by which to judge the doctrines and institutions of the mediaeval church, and the inspiration for the bold attack which he made upon the evils of his times. Long before the Reformation he taught practically all the characteristic doctrines of the Reformation. That the Reformation did not come in his day was not due to any lack of desire or zeal on his part. And when it did come, to a very large extent, the "Reformation followed the lines laid down by Wiclif".<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered, moreover, that although his followers were persecuted and suppressed, Lollardy never became extinct but persisted down to the time of the Reformation.<sup>2</sup> Fisher's description of the "forerunners of the Reformation" can be applied to no one more aptly than to Wyclif, and may well be used as the conclusion of this paper. "Protestantism was a return to the Scriptures as the authentic source of Christian knowledge and to the principle that salvation, that that inward peace, is not from the Church or from human works ethical or ceremonial, but through Christ alone, received by the soul in an act of trust. Whoever, whether in the chair

1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, II, 318.

2. Cf. Ibid. 316, and Fisher, The Reformation, 270.

of theology, in the pulpit, through the devotional treatise, or by fostering the study of languages and of history, or in perilous combat with ecclesiastical abuses, attracted the minds of men to the Scriptures and to a more spiritual conception of religion, was, in a greater or less measure, a reformer before the Reformation".<sup>1</sup>

1. Fisher, 44.

GLOSSARY OF OLD ENGLISH TERMS.

Algatis	always.	Michel, or Mykel	much.
Anentys	concerning.	Neddur	adder.
Assoil	absolve.	Notholes	nevertheless.
Auter	altar.	O.	one.
Charged	burdened.	Rewme	realm.
Dowid	endowed.	Rowning	whispering, confession.
Gostly	spiritual.	Schenden	ruin.
Her, here, Hir, or hor	their.	Sikir	safe, secure.
Heriyng	praising.	Sith, or Sithen	since.
Hestes	commands.	Spede	success.
Hiling	clothing.	Sue	follow.
Kind	nature.	Talwe	tallow.
Leasings, or Lesyngis	lies.	Thof	though.
Levefully	lawfully.	Wynnyng	winning, gain.
Lifelode	livelihood.	Wite	know.
Medefully	meritoriously.	Youe	give.

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