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I. THE LOLLARDS.

IN the Middle Ages there were developed two opposite views of the sphere and mission of the church. One was that of Hildebrand and his school, who began with the claim that the church should be independent of the secular power, and ended with the demand that all civil rulers should recognize the successor of St. Peter as their suzerain. The natural outcome of this theory was that the administration of civil governments should be largely in the hands of ecclesiastics, that the hierarchy should be enriched at the expense of the state, and that the whole body of the clergy should be practically divorced from their spiritual functions.

The other view found advocates in William of Ockham and Marsilius of Padua, who held that the sphere of the church was purely spiritual. Not only was the state independent of the church, but the pope, with all ecclesiastics, was of right, in all secular concerns, subject to the civil ruler.

Of this latter view John Wyclif became the champion in England. It was as a member of the Parliament of 1366, which repudiated the papal claim for tribute that King John had engaged to pay, that we first hear of Wyclif's opposition to the pretensions of Rome. From that time forth he was busy refuting her claims, and, by the use of all the means in his power, helping on the efforts, then making under the lead of John of Gaunt, to exclude the dignitaries of the church from secular offices and confine them to their legitimate work.

Wyclif soon became convinced that the great obstacle which lay in the way of the reform to which he had devoted himself was the wealth of the hierarchy. While bishops and abbots controlled enormous estates they must, of necessity, be secular lords; and, as the greatest among the landed proprietors of the realm, it was inevitable that they should be largely influential in the administration of its government. In his study of the Scriptures he found nothing to justify the possession of wealth by the clergy, but everything to condemn it. Christ and His apostles were poor men, and their successors, like them, should devote themselves to preaching the gospel, while they depended upon the offerings of the people for their support.

Gradually Wyclif reached the conviction that the papal system was essentially at variance with the Scriptures. He came to recognize in it a great despotism which, while it wielded spiritual weapons, was of the earth earthly, and which could not be divested of its wealth and continue to exist. The way was now prepared for his complete repudiation of the papacy. Only the fitting occasion was needed, and it came when, in 1378, the Great Schism occurred and the christian world was called upon to contemplate the unedifying spectacle of two rival successors of St. Peter—one at Rome and the other at Avignon—hurling their curses at each other. He now boldly declared that the papacy was contrary to the Bible, and that the two popes were “the two halves of Anti-christ.”

This rejection of the papacy must not be confounded with the repudiation of the church. There is no evidence that Wyclif now, or ever during his life, contemplated separation from the Catholic communion. A national church, independent of Roman or Avignonesse Pontiff, was no new idea in the world. It is probable that our reformer hoped that the church in England might be separated from the papacy, and that the clergy might be reclaimed and brought to do their legitimate work. At this juncture, it seems to have occurred to him that it might be possible to raise up a body of simple priests, who should have no fixed abiding place, and therefore no fat livings, but should go forth in apostolic poverty to preach the pure word of God wherever men would hear, and thus set an example the contagion of which would finally ef-

fect the reformation of the clergy and the redemption of the church in England. The conception resembles that of Francis of Assisi, but is an improvement on it. Wyclif's band of preachers constituted "a new order, anticipating, in its combination of the regular with the secular element, something of the views of Ignatius Loyola, but in its practical aspect bearing a near resemblance to the lay preachers of John Wesley, such as they were while his strong hand was yet upon them. To be poor without mendicancy, to combine the flexible unity, the swift obedience of an order, with free and constant mingling among the poor; such was the ideal of Wyclif's 'simple priests.'" ¹ That there was no intention to leave the church, but rather to exert an influence within it, is proved by the fact that these preachers "were employed, under episcopal sanction, through what was then the immense diocese of Lincoln, and probably in others also." ²

The office to which these men were appointed was to bring the truth as contained in the Scriptures to the people. The business of the "priest" was, according to Wyclif's view, primarily that of a preacher. Every man has a right to know just what the word of God contains, and the priest must make it known to him. It was but a step from this idea, that all have right to know the truth as it is contained in the Bible, to the conviction that they should not be dependent upon any man as the intermediary of that knowledge. Every believer is a priest and no man should come between him and God. He should have the Scriptures in his own tongue and be permitted to read and judge for himself. We do not know just when Wyclif's version of the New Testament was completed, but we know that he was at work upon it when he instituted his system of itineracy, so that from the beginning, doubtless, these preachers carried with them to their work portions of the Bible in the vernacular. Upon that day when these godly men went forth, with the English Scriptures in their hands, proclaiming that every man has the right to learn the will of God for himself from an open Bible, in a tongue which he can understand, the English Reformation began.

When the wandering preachers first entered upon their mission,

¹ Shirley's introduction to *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, p. xl. ² *Ibid.*

Wyclif had not advanced, in his criticism of the existing ecclesiastical system, beyond matters concerning the external organization and policy of the church. He condemned the papacy, the wealth, the corruption and secularization of the clergy, and the withholding of the word of God from the people. In the beginning, these furnished the matter of the protest of the "simple priests." It was not long, however, before Wyclif's deeper study of the Bible led him into the field of doctrinal reform. In the summer of 1381, he made a bold attack on the central dogma of Rome—the doctrine of transubstantiation. His twelve Conclusions,¹ and the Confession² published a short time afterwards, distinctly declare that after the consecration by the priest the substance of the bread and wine remain as before. The result was his ejection from his chair at Oxford and his retirement to Lutterworth. Applying now fully the principle that the Scriptures are the sole and sufficient guide in all matters of religion, he rejected the worship of saints and images, pilgrimages to shrines, penance, indulgence, absolution—in fact, almost the entire *cultus* of the church. Wyclif's itinerants, reflecting always the master's teachings, now went everywhere denouncing these idolatrous practices and inventions of men.

We have seen that the "poor priests" began their work inside the church, and under episcopal authority. Wyclif was permitted for some reason not well understood, to continue his work as pastor and preacher at Lutterworth unmolested till his death on the last day of 1384. But the wandering preachers soon made themselves obnoxious to the ecclesiastical authorities, and an effort was made to silence them. Archbishop Courtenay, in 1382, issued a mandate for their suppression in the diocese of London,³ and there is reason to believe that repressive measures were inaugurated in other dioceses as well, so that from this time they were not permitted to bear their witness under the authority of the church. But they were not silenced, nor was the growth of their party seriously impeded, if we may credit Henry Knighton, a cotemporary chronicler, who tells us that, in this very year of 1382, they "were

¹ For text see Shirley's *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, pp. 105, 106.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 115-132.

³ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. III., p. 22, (Cattley's Edition).

very much increased, and starting like saplings from the root of a tree, they were multiplied and filled every place within the compass of the land.”¹ To this time we must refer the first application to them of the term *Lollard*, by which it was intended to stigmatize them at once as both fanatics and heretics.²

It was not due to any lack of disposition on the part of Courtenay and his clergy to destroy the Lollards that they were left without molestation until the close of the century. A number of causes combined to secure this end, chief among which may be reckoned the fact that they had gained the sympathy of many of the landed gentry and also of certain members of the highest nobility who were near the king's person. Says Stubbs,³ “In the meanwhile [*i. e.*, in the years 1388 and 1389,] the doctrinal views of the party spread; they counted among their friends some influential knights and some courtiers in whose eyes the political power of the bishops was their greatest sin.” Twice during his reign King Richard II. was upon the point of being drawn into the archbishop's scheme for persecution. In the year 1382, he had, under Courtenay's influence, gone so far as to admit among the statutes of the kingdom an ordinance commanding the sheriffs and other civil officers to lend their assistance to the bishops for the apprehension and imprisonment of the itinerant preachers, together with their adherents.⁴ But though it was pretended that this was done by the consent of Parliament, it was with the concurrence of the House of Lords alone. The Commons, upon their assembling, in October, 1382, insisted that the so-called statute should be annulled, as not having received their approval and, on that account, not being a

¹ See also Stubbs' *Constitutional History of England*, II., 488. and Green's *Short History*, Ch. V., Sec. III.

² The use of the word as a term of reproach is much older. It was applied as early as 1309 to the Brethren of the Free Spirit in Holland and Brabant, and was employed interchangeably with *Beghard*. It was used in Germany also of the *Fratricelli*. The most probable derivation is from *lullen*, to hum, to lull with a song, (cf. lullaby). It was used of the Beghards on account of the chanting to which they were addicted. Originally it suggested fanaticism, and then came to be employed as the equivalent of *heretic*. Any person condemned by the church might be called a Lollard; hence its application to the Wyclifites.

³ *Const. Hist.* II., 488; cf. Milman, *Latin Christianity*, Book XIII., Ch. VII.

⁴ Lechler, *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*, I., 676.

legislative act. Although the archbishop and his suffragans had in the meantime been empowered to imprison the wandering preachers and those who defended the condemned views of Wyclif, and to detain them in their own prisons until they repented or recanted, only a few of the more prominent of these teachers were disturbed.

In the year 1395, certain leading men among the Lollards presented a petition to Parliament, setting forth, in twelve conclusions,¹ the abuses of the church and begging that they be reformed. The twelve conclusions constitute an earnest protest against church endowments, the established form of ordination to the priesthood, celibacy of the clergy, transubstantiation, the use of exorcisms and benedictions of salt, bread, clothes, and the like, the secular employments of priests, prayers for the dead, pilgrimages to shrines together with prayers and offerings to crosses and images, auricular confession, and of vows of chastity taken by women. To these they added denunciations of war and capital punishment, and also of the arts of the goldsmith and sword cutler. This petition, supported as it was by influential members of Parliament, alarmed the clergy, and a desperate effort was made to persuade King Richard, who was absent at the time in Ireland, that the principles of the Lollards therein revealed were not only dangerous to the church, but threatened also the life of the state. The king was moved by the appeal and returned at once to England. The knights who had favored the petition were severely reprimanded, and Richard seemed disposed to heed the exhortation of the pope, which was now added to the solicitation of the archbishop, to lend his assistance to the church in bringing the offending party to punishment and purging England of their doctrines. But the disorders of the kingdom and the difficulties which his tyrannical policy raised up to confront him left Richard no opportunity, and the Lollards escaped for five years longer.

The accession of Henry IV., who in 1399 deposed and succeeded Richard, brought the long averted calamity. Henry, a son of John of Gaunt the protector of Wyclif, had once sympathized,

¹ See text, in the original Latin, in Shirley's edition of *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, pp. 360-369.

as did his father, with the Lollards. But now he needed the support of the clergy to his precarious title to the throne. The agreement between him and Archbishop Arundel, the successor of Courtenay, bound him to coöperate in the extermination of the Lollards. Down to this time no severer punishment had been proposed for heresy than prolonged imprisonment, with a view to recantation, penance, and restoration to the church. But on the 21st of January, 1401, with Henry's sanction, the infamous act, *de haeretico comburendo*, was placed upon the statute book of England,¹ and the work of exterminating the disciples of Wyclif began. At the head of the long line of martyrs stands William Sautré, who, within a few weeks, perished in the flames. But though victim followed victim, the Lollards were not intimidated. They still waged war upon the abuses against which they began their protest. In 1410, they felt strong enough to inaugurate aggressive measures. They presented to the Parliament of this year another petition, praying that "the lands of the bishops and religious corporations should be confiscated, not for a year only, as had been suggested before, but for the permanent endowment of fifteen earls, fifteen hundred knights, six thousand esquires, and a hundred hospitals, £20,000 being still left for the king."²

Such boldness as this may have been due to the fact that the king, although still outwardly in league with the persecutors of the Lollards, was known to have no zeal in the cause. At the beginning of his reign, it had happened that Salisbury, who was popularly recognized as the head of the Lollard party, had refused to acknowledge Henry, and had perished in one of the revolts against him. This fact had been used to justify the allegation that the entire party was disloyal to the House of Lancaster. A petition

¹ Stubbs, *Const. Hist.*, III., 31, 32. See the statute in Burnet's *History of the Reformation*, I., 19. As to the date, some give it as 1400. The confusion arises from the fact that, in the middle ages, many still regarded the year as beginning with March, so that January 21, 1401, would be, according to their mode of reckoning, January 21, 1400. Modern writers frequently introduce confusion by failure to correct, according to present usage, the dates they find in their sources. The writer of the article on the Lollards in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and Lechler, one of the great authorities on Wyclif and the Lollards, have failed to make this correction in the date under consideration.

² Stubbs, *Const. Hist.*, III., 64.

was laid before Henry in the Parliament of 1406, alleging, among other things, that the Lollards were spreading reports that King Richard was alive, and were promulgating the pretended prophecies that he would be restored to the throne.¹ All this activity, so evidently directed to the end of convincing the king that the party was a standing menace to his throne, is suggestive. The king was not zealous enough, and needed to be brought under the influence of motives of a more personal character. It is more suggestive still that, though Henry agreed to the petition, and approved of the statute based upon it, nothing more is heard of it. When this is coupled with the fact that the man who, since the death of Salisbury, was the acknowledged head of the Lollard party, was the intimate friend of the king and continued to receive many tokens of his favor, we are justified in believing that Henry was, at heart, no enemy to the Lollards; and, if this be true, it carries with it the refutation of the charge that the Lollards were threatening the whole fabric of society, and were menacing the throne itself.

That man who kept his place in the favor and affections of the king, notwithstanding the fact that he was chief of the Lollards, was Sir John Oldcastle, who in the right of his wife became Lord Cobham. In early life he had identified himself with the disciples of Wyclif, and there is every reason to believe that, unlike many of the nobility whose sympathy with the Lollards did not extend beyond their efforts to disestablish the church, he had been brought under the power of the truth proclaimed by the "poor priests" and was a sincere and devoted christian man. His castle was always open for the entertainment and protection of the wandering preachers, and he freely used his means to forward the cause. He employed scribes to copy portions of Wyclif's translation of the Scriptures and his tracts, for distribution among the people. He also supported a great number of itinerants, especially in the dioceses of London, Rochester, and Hereford.²

So zealous a Lollard could not have failed to draw upon him the hatred of the primate, and when the fact was recognized that Oldcastle stood as a barrier in the way of the full accomplishment of his designs upon the heretics, Arundel's resentment ripened into

¹ Stubs, *Const. Hist.*, III., 359.

² Foxe, *Acts and Mon.*, III., 322.

the determination to seize the first opportunity that offered itself to destroy him. No such opportunity came, however, during the reign of Henry IV. Oldecastle continued in high favor to the end, being entrusted as late as 1411 (for he was also the first soldier of the kingdom) with the command of the forces sent to the assistance of the Duke of Burgundy. When, in 1413, Henry V. succeeded to the throne, he seems to have thought to atone for his previous gay and dissolute life by becoming the devout patron of the church. Arundel determined to seize upon this new-born zeal to secure the destruction of Oldecastle. The convocation of that year pronounced him "a most pernicious heretic," who should be punished without delay. Accordingly, the archbishop, at the head of a large deputation of ecclesiastical dignitaries, appeared at Kennington, where the king was then sojourning, laid before him charges against Cobham, and begged to be permitted to summon him for trial.¹ "Henry honored the valiant knight, the skillful general, who had already distinguished himself in the wars of France, who might hereafter (for Henry's ambitious schemes were assuredly within his heart) be of signal service in the same fields. He had no doubt that his own arguments would convince so noble a subject, so brave a soldier, so aspiring a knight."² He bade the primate wait, therefore, until he should, by personal appeal, make the effort to induce Oldecastle to confess his errors in religion and submit to the church. Henry little knew the firmness of conviction and the depth of religious feeling which possessed the soul of his subject. The response to the king's arguments and appeal are just what might have been expected from such a man: "You, most worthy prince, I am always prompt and willing to obey, forasmuch as I know you a christian king and the appointed minister of God, bearing the sword to the punishment of evil-doers and for safeguard of them that be virtuous. Unto you, next my eternal God, owe I my whole obedience, and submit thereunto, as I have done ever, all that I have, either of fortune or nature, ready at all times to fulfill whatsoever ye shall in the Lord command me. But, as touching the pope and his

¹ *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, pp. 434, 435.

² Milman, *Latin Christianity*, Vol. VII., p. 418.

spirituality, I owe them neither suit nor service, forasmuch as I know him, by the Scriptures, to be the great Antichrist, the son of perdition, the open adversary of God, and the abomination standing in the holy place.”¹

The king was greatly displeased with Oldecastle's resistance, and, in his resentment, suffered the archbishop to proceed. The knight was summoned before Arundel, to answer upon the charge of heresy, but refused to obey the citation. When, however, the summoner appeared accompanied by the king's officer, Oldecastle, as a loyal subject, submitted. We cannot dwell upon the details of his examinations before the primate.² His bearing was worthy of his station and his faith. No threats could intimidate him; no sophistry could blind him to the real issues. Like the true christian knight that he was, he bore himself with dignity and heroic courage. Of no avail, however, was his defense. He had been abandoned by the king, and the decision of Arundel and his associates had been reached long before the trial began. As an obstinate, unrepentant heretic, he was condemned to death under the statute *de haeretico comburendo*. Remanded to prison to await the day of execution, he made his escape, and seems very soon to have left the vicinity of London and hidden himself in Wales.

The supreme opportunity had now arrived for the enemies of the Lollards. It was well employed to fix upon them finally the guilt of disloyalty and treason. Reports were diligently circulated of the gathering of a large force of Lollards, which, under the command of Oldecastle, should seize the king, make their leader Protector of the realm, destroy the hierarchy, confiscate the ecclesiastical endowments—in a word, revolutionize the state and make an end of the church. Such rumors, diligently bruited abroad, had their desired effect upon the mind of the king, and he was aroused to active coöperation with the archbishop.

The only *fact* which can be established, among the many allegations with which some historians have not scrupled to burden their pages, when dealing with this subject, is that, one night early

¹ Foxe, *Acts and Mon.*, III., 322.

² See Foxe, *Acts and Mon.*, III., 326, *seq.*; also, *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, pp. 433-449.

in January, 1414, and a short time after the escape of Oldcastle, a meeting of Lollards took place at St. Giles's Field, near London. The report was that they were to be joined by 50,000 men from the city. The king, being informed beforehand, set guards at the gates of London, and with an armed force dispersed those who were gathered in St. Giles's Field, and frightened off those who were on their way to the place of rendezvous. Some thirty or forty were captured, and were soon after put to death. The assertion of Mr. Hume,¹ that "upon the trial of the prisoners, the treasonable designs of the sect were rendered certain, both from evidence and from the confession of the criminals themselves," is not borne out by the authorities he cites, not one of whom makes any such statements.² It seems that some of those who were caught on their way to the meeting, when asked whither they were going, said they were going to meet Lord Cobham. It is probable that, having heard of his escape from prison, they supposed he would be present at the meeting; but there is not a shadow of proof that the assembly was for any other purpose than to hear a favorite preacher. Their coming together secretly, and in a secluded place, creates no presumption of treasonable designs. The Lollards were now forbidden to hold public meetings for divine worship, and were compelled to hold their religious services clandestinely. As to Oldcastle, no one has adduced any evidence whatever that he was present, or even in that portion of the island.

When Parliament met in May, 1414, the excitement had not abated. "The chancellor, in his opening speech, declared that one of the causes of the summons was to provide for the defense of the nation against the Lollards,"³ and a step in advance of the statute of 1401 was now taken. Heresy was made an offense against the common law. "The secular power, no longer content to aid in the execution of the ecclesiastical sentences, undertook, where it was needed, the initiative against the Lollards."⁴ The new statute required all civil officers of the realm to "make oath,

¹ *History of England*, ch. 19, Vol. II., p. 415.

² See Lord Brougham's *History of England and France under the House of Lancaster*. Note XXVIII., pp. 375-377.

³ Stubbs, *Const. Hist.*, III., 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*

in taking of their charge and offices, to extend their whole pain and diligence to put out, cease, and destroy, all manner of heresies and errors, commonly called lollardies, within the places in which they exercise their charges and offices from time to time, with all their power."¹ Henceforth conviction of heresy was at the same time conviction of treason, and carried with it forfeiture of blood and estate. Under this law, not only Oldcastle, but every Lollard in the realm was a traitor, no matter how loyal in fact he might be to the king.

Sir John had already been declared an outlaw, and a price, equal in our present money to \$40,000, set upon his head. It is just possible that he, driven thus to desperation and as the only means of self-defense, was ready to excite rebellion or join in with the enemies of the king in Scotland and elsewhere. This, we say, is just possible and may be the fact, but there is no conclusive evidence to that effect. In fact, so very little weight is there in the evidence which those who are interested in blackening Oldcastle's character can adduce, that the more careful historians decline to commit themselves with confidence to the affirmation that he was guilty.² Others deny that there is any truth whatever in these charges.³ For more than three years, he was able to hide himself in Wales; but, towards the close of the year 1417, he was captured and brought to London. The lords, upon the petition of the commons, sentenced him to execution, and he was hung in chains as a traitor and slowly roasted to death as a heretic.

¹ See statute entire in Foxe's *Acts and Mon.*, III., 353-355.

² Stubbs, *Const. Hist.*, III., 80, says: "He failed in an attempt to excite a rebellion in 1415, in connection, it is said, with the Southampton plot." In a footnote, on the same page, he adds: "Oldcastle either was, or was said to be, in league with the Scots and with the Mortimer party in Wales, and to have relations with the pseudo-Richard even at the last." Robertson, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII., pp. 300, 301 (*American Edition*), says: "He afterwards reappeared, and, as he was supposed to be concerned in revolutionary designs, was arrested, and was brought to the bar of the House of Lords." Cf. Milman's *Latin Christianity*, VII., pp. 423-425. On page 424, he says: "*He was said* to have declared himself a faithful subject of his liege lord, Richard II., thus avouching, as though in secret intelligence with the Scots, the wild tale, unquestionably current, that Richard was still alive in that kingdom."

³ Foxe, *Acts and Mon.*, III., 348-405; Brougham, *History of England and France under the House of Lancaster*, 81, 82.

With the death of Oldecastle, the Lollards lost whatever political significance they had ever had. They were still persecuted, but the violence of it gradually abated, until, in 1431, it ceased entirely, and the followers of Wyclif dropped from the records of the times.

If we seek an explanation of this fact, we are informed by some of the historians that the Lollard party itself became, at this time, practically extinct. For example, Froude, after relating the events connected with Oldecastle's death, and the story of the measures employed in the next following years against the Lollards, adds: "Thus perished Wycliffe's labor,—not wholly, because his translation of the Bible still remained a rare treasure: a seed of future life, which would spring again under happier circumstances. But the sect which he organized, the special doctrines which he set himself to teach, after a brief blaze of success, sank into darkness; and no trace remained of Lollardy except the black memory of contempt and hatred with which the heretics of the fourteenth century were remembered by the English people, long after the actual reformation had become the law of the land."¹

If we desire to know how it is to be accounted for that so promising a movement should have come to so untimely an end, it is intimated that the party gathered by Wyclif's wandering priests soon ceased to be interested chiefly in matters of religion, and became a political party; that it frittered away its force in various directions, to the neglect of the high ends which had inspired the immediate disciples of Wyclif,² and that, when its political leader was gone, it was only a matter of time for this now aimless party to go to pieces and disappear.

Had the writers who have promulgated these opinions taken the trouble to gather all the facts and give them their proper interpretation, they would have discovered, *1st*, That the Lollards, as a party, were never more than incidentally connected with the political agitations of the times; and *2nd*, That the movement to which Wyclif gave impulse never came to an end; but that his followers continued to exist in great numbers throughout the fif-

¹ *History of England*, II., 35.

² Creighton, *The Papacy during the Reformation*, I., 306.

teenth century, and constituted one of the chief factors in the religious revolution of the next century, which gave England to Protestantism. Let us consider these in their order:

1. Mention has been made already of Wyclif's views concerning the connexion between the wealth of the church and the secularization and corruption of the clergy. In his opposition to the opulence and political power of the hierarchy, he had the sympathy of a great number of the nobility and landed gentry of England. As it had been with the master, so it was with the disciples. Gradually there was attracted to the Lollard party a considerable body of knights who were chiefly interested in its protest against the endowments of the church. As time went on, they took the lead in the agitation of this matter. It was they who inspired and directed the efforts to secure legislation looking to the confiscation of the ecclesiastical estates. Now, it must be admitted that the Lollards, as a body, sympathized with these efforts, and desired the alienation of the lands and other property of the hierarchy; but this was desired by the great mass of the party strictly as a matter of reform, and in the interests of evangelical religion. It was no socialistic scheme proceeding upon principles which menaced the very fabric of society, as some have alleged. So far is this from being true that, as we have seen, it was proposed to use the church endowments to strengthen the existing order in England, by creating estates out of it for a large number of earls, knights and esquires. What the Lollards had at heart was to make the church what Christ had ordained it should be—an institute for proclaiming the gospel to sinners, and for edifying the people of God and training them in holiness of life. This, they conceived, could be done only by making the clergy simple ministers of the Word, dependent upon the offerings of the people to whom they preached. Again, it must be noticed that this contention against church endowments was not the sole thing, nor yet the chief thing, for which the Lollards stood. The impression that it was such is naturally made by the fact that it is in connection with this, almost exclusively, that the Lollards are mentioned in the history of the times. Unfortunately, we have upon the pages of the historian usually only an account of the doings of princes and parliaments, pre-

lates and convocations, the quarrels of the great, and the wars whose end was the aggrandizement of the few. Where the Lollards touched this sphere of political life they became an object of interest to the chroniclers, and by consequence to those who have wrought up the materials furnished by the chroniclers. But no notice is taken of the fact that, while the Lollard knights were urging confiscation schemes in parliament, the humble Lollard preachers were going everywhere, with the Bible in their hands, teaching the simple gospel and warning men against the idolatry of the mass, saint and image worship, and reliance upon the merit of pilgrimages and other forms of will-worship. The great majority of those who had identified themselves with the movement were more interested in keeping themselves pure from the defilements of Rome, and learning what the Scriptures taught, than in anything else. That such was the case may be learned even from their enemies, whose indictment of them never fails to include the complaint that they despise the mass and saint and image worship as idolatrous; that they condemn pilgrimages to shrines, auricular confession, penance and absolution; and that they insist on reading, or hearing read, in the vernacular, the gospels, Paul's epistles, and other portions of the Scriptures.¹ It will be remembered that Sir John Oldcastle employed many scribes in multiplying copies of the Scriptures and of Wyclif's tracts for the people, and that he was obnoxious to the hierarchy chiefly on account of his fostering care of the Lollard movement as an *evangelical* movement. The charges brought against him and his confession of faith upon his trial alike show that it was not as a political agitator that he was arraigned, but as a professor and promulgator of the great truths of the gospel which witness against the teachings and practice of the Church of Rome.²

These hints, and many more like them, of which the historians have taken no account, reveal to us what was the real core and life of the Lollard movement in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Devotion to the word of God and the truth it revealed; loyalty to Jesus Christ and zeal for the pure and simple worship

¹ Cf. Foxe's *Acts and Mon.*, III., 221-319.

² Foxe's *Acts and Mon.*, III., 326 *seq.*

which He had ordained as against the idolatrous inventions of Rome, these were the distinctive characteristics of the party then as always. It is a perversion, then, of the truth of history, based upon the most superficial view of the facts, to represent the Lollards as essentially a political party which ceased to bear witness to the great truths, zeal for which had given it birth.

The natural outcome, as we have seen, of this belief, that the *raison d'être* of the Lollard party had come to be political agitation, was the conclusion that, when its activity in this sphere was no longer recognized, the party itself had gone out of existence. The proof that it continued to exist, and that too with all its old vigor of life, is, at the same time, proof that its relation to such agitations was accidental, and that it was rooted in something deeper. We now pass on to the examination of the evidence bearing on this point.

2. The first evidence we would adduce for the continued existence of the Lollards as a religious party is furnished us by King Henry VI., in a writ issued by him in July, 1439.¹ This writ gives information that numerous pilgrims were accustomed to visit the spot, on Tower Hill, where Richard Wiche, an itinerant Lollard preacher, had been, some years before, burned to death for heresy. He had been greatly revered while alive, and having preached "in many places within the realm of England," was widely known. The writ recites that many declared that he died "a good, a just, and a holy man." There can be no question that those who honored him by visits to the place where he died were Lollards. The number of these pilgrims was considerable enough to create apprehensions that the dreaded Wyclifites might be conspiring, as once they were charged with doing in the days of Oldcastle. Moreover, there is an indication that they came from many portions of the country in the fact that copies of the writ were sent to all the sheriffs throughout the realm, charging them to prevent these admirers of Richard Wiche from coming up to London to do him honor. Where there was one pilgrim, especially from the more distant localities, there must have been many

¹ See the document in Foxe, III., 703.

more Lollards left at home. Indefinite as are the conclusions which we can draw from the data furnished by this writ as to numbers, it clearly indicates that the Lollards were not few, nor lacking in zeal for the truths to which Richard Wiche bore witness at the stake.

Passing over a period of ten years, we find in a book published in the year 1449, by Dr. Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, no little information concerning the Lollards. The title of the book of itself sufficiently indicates against whom it was directed: "The Repressor of over much blaming the Clergy." It is a polemic against the "Lay-party," or "Bible-men." The title by which these sectaries designated themselves, the bishop informs us, was "Known-men" (*i. e.*, *known of God*, or *elect*). This title makes it certain that they were Wyclifites, since they are represented as taking it from 1 Cor. xiv. 38, a passage which Wyclif mistranslates, "*If any man unknoweth, he schal be unknowen.*" Their doctrine, as Pecock represents it, was that without a knowledge of the Scriptures no man would be saved, but that those who knew the Scriptures were known of God, or "known-men." This implied that every man should have the Scriptures in his own tongue, and that every man could understand them by the help of God's Spirit without the intervention of the priest. Against this doctrine, that plain people can understand the Bible, Pecock lays out his strength. At great length and with every indication that he is dealing with no man of straw he assails this fundamental position of the Lollards. It is evident that he is contending against a strong party which threatens to take out of the hands of the learned the interpretation of the Scriptures. Here, then, in the middle of the fifteenth century, nearly twenty years after the time at which Mr. Froude declares the sect organized by Wyclif sank into darkness without leaving a trace except a "black memory" behind it, there were numerous "known-men," who held and propagated the very doctrines which the Lollards had been teaching from the beginning: ¹ persons who insisted upon the right and the ability of plain men to know the word of God for themselves,

¹ He names them Lollards, in at least one passage: "*The erring persoones of the lay peple which ben clepid Lollardis.*"—*Repressor*, I. Part, Chap. 20.

and to preach the gospel, and who despised and rejected the Romish clergy.¹

A third ground of inference is furnished us by the extant manuscripts of the whole or parts of Wyclif's Bible. There are still in existence thirty such MSS., which were made between the years 1430 and 1440, and twenty others which belong to the period from 1440 to 1450.² What is the significance of the fact that these fifty MSS. from this time still remain to us?

Let the reader consider what proportion of the manuscripts actually made was likely to survive the three hundred years, and more, before any special care was taken to preserve these remains. Let him consider that for one hundred years, and more, from the beginning of this period Wyclif's Bible was a proscribed book, and that strenuous and repeated efforts were made to destroy it. Many of those who possessed these precious manuscripts were required to cast them into the flames, and it had happened more than once that great bonfires were made of the English Scriptures and other books belonging to the Lollards.³ Will it be considered extravagant, in view of the lapse of time during which many manuscripts must have perished by use, by various accidents, and especially by systematic efforts to destroy every copy of Wyclif's Bible, to say that these fifty MSS. are the survival of many hundreds made during that period? But, further, it must be remembered that there were already in existence very many copies of the English Scriptures before 1430, which continued in use during the time of which we are now speaking. There are still extant

¹ For a short but excellent *resumé* of the opinions of the Lollards of this period, as gathered from Peacock's *Repressor*, see *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Art. Lollards: cf. Lechler's *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*. II., 371-399 and 422-426.

² Forshall and Madden's *Wyclifite Versions*, I., Introduction.

³ About the year 1540 there appeared in Italy a book entitled "On the Benefits of Christ's Death," setting forth the doctrine of justification by faith. Ranke (*History of Popes*, p. 38,) informs us that it had "an incredible success." Hundreds of thousands of copies were circulated, but, so utterly was it expunged by the efforts of the church, that when Ranke wrote he could say that not a trace of the work existed. Since that time (1834) two or three copies have been discovered. (See Häusser's *Period of the Reformation*, p. 274.) This may serve to suggest how many MSS. of Wyclif's Bible perished.

twenty-five MSS. made during the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and many others of an earlier date.¹ All these, and many more as old as they which have perished, were in the hands of the Lollards of that day. Taking all these considerations into account, it would seem fair to conclude that, in 1450, there were in the possession of persons connected with this sect several thousand copies of the whole or a part of the English Bible.

But, further, it must not be forgotten that this was an age when a large proportion of the people could not read. Although the Lollards made special efforts in this direction, if we may judge from certain hints dropped by confessors at a later date, we must conclude that, owing to the poverty of the great majority of them, and consequent lack of opportunity, the proportion among them of those who could read was probably not much above the average. In fact, we find on record later abundant evidence to this point in the frequently recurring charge brought against accused persons that they had read the gospels or Paul's epistles to others. One chief object of the frequent secret meetings of the Lollards was that the Scriptures might be read for the benefit of those who were dependent upon this means of becoming acquainted with them. There must have been, then, very many more Lollards than there were copies of Wyclif's Bible. Doubtless many who could read them did not possess books of their own, for they were costly. We have in this fact abundant grounds for concluding that, in the middle of the fifteenth century, the Lollards were numerous,—probably as numerous as they had ever been.

The facts with which we have been dealing bring us to the eve of the War of the Roses, which agitated England for thirty years (1455–1485). It is not strange that in such a time little note should be taken of these humble and unobtrusive people. But that they still lived and loved the word of God in those dark days of revolution and bloodshed, is proved by other manuscripts of Wyclif's Bible made during those years and still in existence. In the very year of the triumph of Henry Tudor (1485) persecution began again in England; and at once the evidence of the existence and activity of the Lollards becomes abundant. A number of per-

¹ Forshall and Madden's *Wyclifite Versions*. I., Introduction.

sons in the See of Coventry and Lichfield were arraigned before the bishop upon accusations which identify them unmistakably with the Lollards.¹ Nine years later, an aged woman was burned at Smithfield as a disciple of Wyclif.² Thus, in this place so noted in the annals of martyrdom, were lighted the fires which were not to go out finally until more than a century had passed away.

As showing how widely the influence of Wyclif's teachings had spread, it may be mentioned that in this same year (1494) thirty persons were summoned by the Archbishop of Glasgow before King James IV. of Scotland and his council, upon charges which show them to have been Lollards. These charges may be read in John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland,³ where the alleged heretics are called the "Lollards of Kyle." From another source we learn that these opinions were "spreading rapidly throughout the kingdom, especially in the western districts of Kyle, Carrick, and Cunningham."⁴

At Amersham, in Buckinghamshire, sixty persons were, in 1506, condemned as Lollards. Their chief teacher, William Tylsworth, was burned, his own daughter being compelled to light the fire, while his entire flock bore fagots in token of their deserving the same fate.⁵ In the diocese of London the work of persecution went on during all the early years of the sixteenth century. The Bishop of Lincoln made more than one cruel attack upon the Lollards, and many were weak enough to abjure and make their peace with the church.⁶ Many pages of the "Acts and Monuments" are filled with accounts of these persecutions, which antedate the beginning of the Reformation in Germany. The question arises: How are we to account for the activity of the hierarchy at this time against the Lollards? The only satisfactory explanation is that they were growing in numbers and were winning to their views many persons from the bosom of the church. There is reason to believe that not a few priests in orders were in full sympathy with them.

¹ Foxe, *Acts and Mon.*, IV., 133-135. ² Foxe, IV., 7. ³ Book I., *ad init.*

⁴ Hetherington, *History of the Church of Scotland*, ch. II.

⁵ Foxe, IV., 123, 124. The martyrologist declares that at the time he wrote there were still alive in the town of Amersham both men and women who were witnesses of the execution of Tylsworth.

⁶ Foxe, IV., 214.

What else could it be besides their rapidly increasing numbers and their greater boldness and activity that provoked the measures against them? This presumption is largely confirmed when we come to read the story of the itinerant preacher, Thomas Man, who perished at Smithfield in March, 1518.¹ He had been arrested, tried, and silenced by imprisonment, in 1511, but had subsequently escaped and pursued his calling again for a time. His chief activity belongs, however, to the period before 1511. On his last trial it appeared in evidence against him that "he had been in divers places and counties in England, and had instructed very many, as at Amersham, at London, at Billericary, at Chelmsford, at Stratford-Langthorn, at Uxbridge, at Henly-upon-Thames, in Suffolk and Norfolk, at Newbury, and divers places more, where he himself testifieth that as he went westward he found a great company of well-disposed persons, being of the same judgment touching the Lord's Supper that he was of," etc. Man declared that "he had turned seven hundred people to his religion and doctrine, for which he thanked God." This was the sort of zeal and activity which doubtless characterized many an earnest and faithful evangelist. It is not strange that such efforts, and such fruits attending, aroused the hierarchy to renewed efforts against the sect.

Shortly after Luther had entered upon his career as a reformer, when his books began to appear in England, and his influence began to be felt, the zeal of the persecutors was quickened all the more. Among those most forward in this business, must be mentioned John Longland, Bishop of Lincoln. Foxe² has preserved for us some pages from this prelate's register for the year 1521, in which we read the names of several hundred people who were charged with heresy, together with the matters that were laid in information against them, under the system of espionage which he organized. It is with some surprise that we find in this record not the least evidence that any one of those accused had been influenced by Luther, or the movement which had been going forward for more than three years in Germany. They are all simple laboring people, with no point of contact with that learned circle which had begun to read Luther's books and imbibe his principles. They are

¹ Foxe, IV., 208-214.

² *Acts and Monuments*, IV., 219-246.

charged with reading the Scriptures in English (*i. e.*, Wyclif's Bible) and "Wyclif's Wicket"; with rejecting the doctrine of the real presence in the eucharist, as well as pilgrimages to shrines, the worship of images, and like matters. We learn that they were accustomed to meet together secretly to hear the Scriptures read and expounded; that they repudiated utterly the pretensions of the Romish clergy, and maintained the right of laymen to preach and administer the sacraments. These were the doctrines of the Lollards and it is evident that these persons, who called themselves "known-men," as the disciples of Wyclif had done a century before, were simply Lollards. Luther's movement, which was beginning to agitate the great literary centres of Cambridge and Oxford, had not yet touched the plane on which they moved.

In speaking of the English Reformation, it is customary to recognize two distinct elements which combined to make England a Protestant country. The one was the movement, more political than religious, by which Henry VIII. cast aside the papal supremacy and made himself the head of a separate, national English Church; the other was the evangelical movement, which, taking occasion of this politico-ecclesiastical revolution, transformed the corrupt English Establishment into a Reformed Church. Little notice has been taken, however, of the fact that the evangelical movement itself was two-fold in its origin. The history of one of these we have traced from its beginnings to the Reformation period. The other, and younger, branch of the evangelical party in England may be said to have taken its impulse from the publication of the Greek Testament of Erasmus, in the year 1516. The revival of learning had prepared the way at Oxford and Cambridge, and a number of young men in these seats of learning were brought under the power of saving truth by the perusal of the Greek Scriptures. Then came the powerful tracts and expositions of Luther, to confirm and help forward the work which was already on the way. Thus there gradually grew up in England a considerable body of earnest, evangelical men, who were at the same time learned and able preachers of the gospel. Among these was William Tyndale, who early conceived the idea of translating the Scriptures from the original Hebrew and Greek into the English

tongue. It was he who, through his version of the Bible, gave a new impulse to the Lollard movement, and prepared it to become the leaven which contributed more than all other influences besides towards leavening the whole lump.

We have seen how the "known-men" had loved the Scriptures during all the century and a half since the poor priests first went forth with Wyclif's version to proclaim the gospel. But there had never been, we may believe, an adequate supply of these manuscripts; and, besides, the considerable cost of a transcript of the entire Bible or of even the whole New Testament forced many to content themselves with copies of the four gospels, or of Paul's epistles, or some other fragment of the Scriptures. Moreover, with all its merits, Wyclif's version had the defects of a translation from a translation. But from 1526 onward, the New Testament, and a few years later the Old Testament as well, in a version practically the same as that from which we read to-day, could be procured for a price within the means of all.

It was not long after the first copies of Tyndale's New Testament found their way into England from the continent, where they were printed, that the demand for them entirely outran the supply. So extraordinary was this demand that first one printer in Antwerp, and a little later several others, undertook the publication of the book as a business investment. The result was that soon thousands of copies of the New Testament were sold in England, in spite of all the strenuous efforts of Wolsey and the other churchmen to exclude it. Now it was the Lollards who, through eagerness to procure this improved translation, in large measure created this demand. The natural results followed. They continued to increase in numbers as well as in the depth and ardor of their piety, and their influence became more powerful than ever. Their "conventicles" were multiplied, and from being mere assemblies they came to be organizations. They were now called "congregations," being made up of believers only, and patterned after the model of the apostolic churches.¹ Their meetings were still, of necessity, secret, as in those earlier days when the "conventicula occulta" had been held in lonely peasant houses, or in pits and

¹ Conant, *History of English Bible*, p. 175.

caves of the earth,¹ for there was no place for them in Henry VIII.'s church, any more than there had been place for them in the Church of Rome during the reign of the representatives of the House of Lancaster.

As Tyndale's Version had communicated a new impulse to the Lollards, so it became a bond between them and the evangelical body of learned men, already mentioned, of whom Tyndale was one. Most of these were preachers; and when they went forth, as many of them did, like Wyclif's simple priests, with the English Bible in their hands, the Lollards furnished, in large measure, the audiences which heard them. Thomas Bilney was a pioneer in this work. When, in 1532, John Frith, whose name is inseparably associated with that of Tyndale, returned secretly to England from the continent, he seems to have had for his mission to visit the congregations as a kind of representative of Tyndale.

As the years went on, it became more and more evident that Henry VIII. was inexorably opposed to any real evangelical reform. This was made sufficiently plain by the Ten Articles of 1536, which constituted the first doctrinal deliverance of the Church of England after the rupture with Rome.² Three years later, the Six Articles appeared, which re-asserted the essential points of the Romish system, denounced death against all who should deny transubstantiation, and made imprisonment, confiscation of goods, or death, according to the degree of guilt, the penalty of rejecting other articles.³ The effect of this could not fail to be the creation of a closer bond between all evangelical christians. The party of reformers, which had originated in the impulse given by the new learning and by the appearance of the Greek Testament of Erasmus, and had been strengthened by the influence of Luther, split into two sections. One consisted of those who had not got far enough upon the way to see clearly that there was no compromise with Rome, or of temporizers whose eyes were blinded by their vivid sense of the supreme importance of pleasing the king. The other section was composed of those who had gone the whole length demanded by logical consistency, and felt compelled to reject every one of the Six Articles as irreconcilably opposed to the word of

¹ Lechler, II., 307.

² Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, I., 611.

³ *Ibid*, 613.

God. This second section of the party now coalesced with the older evangelical party of the Lollards, and lifted it up towards its own plane socially and intellectually. The despised "gospellers," as those who preached without the authority of the church were called, were no longer all of them unlettered rustics, but many were suited to shine in any circle; and among their hearers were not a few representatives of the middle and the higher classes.

Upon the accession of Edward VI. in 1547, those of the reformers who had compromised themselves and thus retained their connection with the church under Henry, became predominant in the Court Church party. It was they who, under the lead of Cranmer, directed the reforms in the Establishment. They manifested their sympathy with the old order of things by adopting, as nearly as possible, the ritual of Rome, but in an English dress. They showed the influence of the strict evangelical party in the creed which they gave to the church, which in almost every particular reflects the views of those who had identified themselves with the disciples of Wyclif.

Turning once more to those whom we may continue, with propriety, to call the Lollards, there is reason to believe that they still preserved the organization of their congregations. During the persecution of Mary's reign they reappear, and most probably they had never been disbanded. The Lollards, however, now made a decided approach towards the church. They hoped for its complete reformation, and were anxious to hasten it by their presence and coöperation. Thus partially identified with the Establishment, but not entirely incorporated with it, they exerted the powerful influence upon it which has already been alluded to.

Speaking now more particularly of that influence, to it must be attributed the fact that English Protestantism, in rejecting transubstantiation, did not accept in its stead the views of Luther on the real presence, but adopted the scriptural doctrine of the spiritual presence of Christ in the supper. We have only to read the story of the persecutions of the Lollards, from the day when Wyclif was excluded from his chair at Oxford down to the close of Henry's reign, to learn that one chief subject of their witnessing was that the bread and wine continued to be bread and wine after their consecration by the priest, and that Christ was present in no cor-

poreal sense but only to the faith of the worthy communicant. It was this doctrine, for which not a few of them had died in recent years, that they gave to the learned men who made common cause with them, when they could find no home in Henry's church. When Edward VI. came to the throne, and England first took her place among the Protestant peoples, it was not long before she was recognized as standing upon the Reformed side of the great sacramentarian controversy which had divided continental Protestantism into two hostile camps. In the very year of Edward's accession, and the next, several prominent theologians who had suffered upon the continent for their rejection of the Lutheran doctrine found a refuge in England. It was in the year 1548 that Cranmer, by the influence quite as much of native divines as of the foreign, adopted the Reformed view, and so it found its way into the Forty-two (later Thirty-nine) Articles. The doctrine of the eucharist was, thus, not imposed from above, but fought its way from the lowly conventicles of the Lollards up to the archiepiscopal seat of Canterbury, to the court of Edward, and then into the Creed of the church.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of this fact, that the evangelical party in England rejected the Lutheran real presence, and adopted the view which brought them into sympathy with the Swiss Reformers. It was due to this not only that Peter Martyr, Martin Bucer, and other Reformed divines, found their way to England and exerted a great influence, but it was also due to this, that when Hooper fled from England after the promulgation of the Bloody Articles, he found his way finally to Zurich, where he was fortified by Bullinger in the views which made him "the first Puritan Confessor." To this also is to be attributed the fact that, when the persecution under Mary began, the exiles, eight hundred in number, were repelled by the Lutherans, and therefore had to find places of refuge among the Reformed. It was in this way that many of them came under the direct influence of Calvin in Geneva. They received much from Calvin and the other theologians at whose feet they sat; but it was rather in the way of development and confirmation of the principles for which they stood before, and which had descended to them from Wyclif through the Lollards.

Upon their return to England the congregations, which in Mary's day had fallen back again upon the lay readers and preachers, heard them gladly. The hopes of a complete reformation of the Church, cut short by the death of Edward, revived under Elizabeth; and now there was heard more distinctly the enunciation of that great principle which lay at the basis of Wyclif's revolt from Rome, to-wit: that the Scriptures constitute the supreme guide of the church, both in faith and practice. The Lollards, proceeding on this principle, when they could not secure the reform of the church, but were cast out and persecuted, retired from view as completely as they could, and worshipped God according to the simple model set forth in His word. But these Lollards of Elizabeth's reign, with all the aggressiveness of the earlier days of the party, and with all the weight that learning added to intense conviction could give them, insisted that the Church of England should become a reformed church, not only in its creed, but also in its polity and forms of worship. This could be done only by the rejection of everything not expressly set down in Scripture, or to be deduced therefrom by good and necessary inference. Whereas Hooper had objected only to vestments, the Puritans of Elizabeth's day were bent upon the abolition of the hierarchy and the exclusion of the prayer-book. Whereas Hooper protested against the vestments chiefly because they were associated in the popular mind with the idolatries of Rome, these later Protestants waged their battle against what they considered to be positively unlawful, as finding no warrant in the word of God. This is the legitimate outcome of Wyclif's principle. It was simply the old Lollard protest in its developed form and carried to its logical consequences.

Thus it appears that the Puritans were only the Lollards re-inforced from the ranks of the learned, helped forward by the great reformers of the sixteenth century, but still the Lollards, uttering the same protests, witnessing for the same truths, planting their feet upon the same fundamental principle as they had done from the days of Wyclif himself. The Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the Puritans of to-day, are all the children of "Wyclif, a Puritan of the Puritans before there was a Puritan."

J. F. LATIMER.