

**JOHN WYCLIF IN HIS TRUE LIGHT.**

**The Alleged Protestant Martyr Shown to be a Mere Captious Sorcerer.**

The Rev. Joseph Stevenson, S. J., has added yet one more volume ("The Truth About John Wyclif, His Life, Writings and Opinions, Chiefly from the Evidence of His Contemporaries," to the list of works destined to explode long-cherished historical illusions that have seen the light during the last quarter of a century. We do not mean to speak of purely Protestant prejudices as to the character of John Wyclif. But it has been a favorite idea, even with Catholics, that Henry VIII had to deal with a good, simple, believing people, whom he sundered by unparalleled violence, from the unity of the Church. That belief, as far as it concerns the religious character of Englishmen at the opening of the sixteenth century, must be largely modified. The majority, nay, a very large majority of Englishmen were, no doubt, Catholics, and many of them good Catholics. But the spread of error, especially among the lower classes, for two hundred years before, despite of many severely repressive measures, had been simply appalling. The peculiar forms of these errors bore a very strong family resemblance to the system that triumphed in England under Edward VI and Elizabeth—in a word to Protestantism. The book we are reviewing leaves no room to doubt, from the ample evidence we possess, though but a fragment of what might have come down to us, that long before the name of Protestant had been invented, Protestants might have been counted, perhaps by many thousands, on English soil. Had that soil not been well prepared for it, not even the strong Tudor will could have made the evil plant take root. Neither the evil lives of many Catholics, though this element weakend the power of resistance; nor the powerful influence of the Tudor sovereigns; nor the abilities of men like Luther and Calvin, suffice to account for the success of the Protestant revolution in England. Protestantism had had a long pedigree. It had its rise in the Caesarism of the Conqueror and his descendants. Its principles were embodied in the teaching of John Wyclif.

"Probably there never was a time when it could be said that our country was absolutely free from error, either as regards its ecclesiastical politics or its religious belief. From the time of early Normans there had always been in England a party which looked with undiguised suspicion on the dealings of the Papal Curia, as far as they were supposed to trench on the privileges and liberties of the sovereign. Many of the nobility, and even some of the bishops, would gladly have made the king independent of the Pontiff in all matters save those which were of a purely dogmatic nature. Here it is enough to refer to the aggressions of William Rufus and the two Henrys, which were resisted by St. Anselm and St. Thomas of Canterbury. From the king this anti-Papal feeling descended to the nobility, and from the nobility to their tenants. This unfortunate irritation was kept alive by the system of Papal provisions, whereby patrons of benefices complained that they were deprived of their privileges, of which they loudly clamored for their restitution."

Such were the predisposing causes; and when we find the yoke of authority irksome we try at once to persuade ourselves that the said authority is an usurpation. To efface the distinction between the human and supernatural elements in the Papal jurisdiction and set it all down as a mere earthly institution was the next step, and along with this the whole system of Church discipline, nay, the whole Christian priesthood and sacramental principles must needs be overturned. This is exactly what was done by the Wyclifites, and it forms the mainspring of the Protestant system, if system it can be called. Of course, accidental circumstances, as usual, set the machinery in motion. Disappointed ambition turned John Wyclif from an active churchman into a heretic, as it has done with many another since his day. This fact is at all events now as clear as daylight on the faith of records of unquestioned authenticity. Archbishop Islip, in founding Canterbury Hall at Oxford, had imprudently attempted to unite Benedictine monks and secular priests in one and the same collegiate establishment. The undertaking did not work harmoniously, as might have been foreseen. The archbishop removed the monks and made over the college to the secular priests, with Wyclif, then master of Balliol, as warden. This was done without the authorization from the crown needed for its legality, and was subsequently held to be invalid. Besides, in making it over to the secular clergy he

expressly reserved the right of altering the arrangement at any future period, if he chose. Islip's register at Lambeth contains some quaint rules for the new college. No one shall be eligible as a fellow who has any notable mark on his face. The cost of gowns, furs, etc., is minutely regulated. Latin is to be spoken in the house, "but they are not all to chatter together at the same time like geese or magpies." The archbishop and his successors are to have the sole power of regulating the said hall in its head members and property, with full power to alter its statutes at will. Islip died in 1366, and was succeeded by Simon de Langham, chancellor of England. His legal knowledge showed him that in the eye of the law the hall had lapsed to the crown. Langham determined to turn Canterbury hall into a college for the Benedictine monks of his own cathedral. He began by appointing Henry de Woodhull, a monk of Canterbury, instead of Wyclif, who only held his office at the pleasure of the archbishop. Thus was Wyclif, at an early period of his career, brought into collision with the monastic order, which he afterwards attacked with the bitterest hatred. He refused to submit, and appealed to Rome, and the cause was heard at Viterbo before Cardinal de Rocha, formerly abbot of Cluny. Judgement was given in favor of the archbishop, and the monks succeeded the secular clergy at Canterbury Hall.

This was a bitter disappointment for the ex-warden, the more so as he had wished to pose as the champion of the seculars in a quarrel with regulars, and perhaps as a "Northern" against Kentishmen. Wyclif hoped to console himself by obtaining the vacant See of Worcester. At least so we are told by more than one English writer within a quarter of a century after Wyclif's death. If so, he met with a second disappointment. From this time he began the warfare against the teaching and authority of the Catholic Church, which he continued unceasingly to carry on till his death. Were we wrong in surmising that his enmity to Rome had its source in disappointed ambition?

We have thought it well by the above summary to call special attention to this first portion of Father Stevenson's work, because it relates to facts less universally known than the general character of Wyclif's heresies. As to these latter they savor strongly of Calvinism, while on morals they have a great affinity with the doctrines of Socialists and the advocates of "Free Love." In a word, his blasphemous utterances would shock the great majority of Protestants. Strangely enough, he retained to the last a respect for the honor of the Blessed Virgin. After reading what Father Stevenson has given us from contemporary sources, we think it would not be easy to deny that the brutal excesses of the Kentish revolutionaries, in 1382, were in great part traceable to Wyclif's influence. Here we are forcibly reminded of what we have read of Wesley's participation in the hideous scenes of the Gordon riots, though Wyclif, unlike his successor, thought it safest to remain tranquil in his Leicester rectory while bolder men were engaged in the work of bloodshed and pillage.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**The Duke of Norfolk and Mr. Chamberlain.**

The Duke of Norfolk has addressed the following letter to the London Times. "My attention has just been called to a speech of Mr. Chamberlain's at Birmingham, on the 7th inst. In it he uses the following expressions. I fear I must quote them at length, or their spirit and motive will not appear. He is speaking at the time of the great famine in Ireland. He says: 'There was famine throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. There was only one class that profited, and that was the landlords, who continued to exact their rents. There was a great landlord in those days, the Duke of Norfolk, who recommended to the people that they should take a pinch of curry powder in water to keep off the pangs of hunger. Ah! that was a statement which created the greatest excitement throughout the land, and the Duke was denounced on a hundred platforms and in thousands and hundreds of thousands of homes. People began to talk of a certain French Minister named Foulon, in the time of the French Revolution, who, when he was told that the people were starving, replied: "Let the people eat grass;" and within a few months the people took Foulon, and they hung him to a lamp-post with a bunch of grass in his mouth. People remembered these things.'

"Let me explain the true nature of this incident. My grandfather did not own any land in Ireland, but on one

occasion, when speaking of the efforts being made to relieve the sufferings of the people in Ireland, he mentioned that he had been told that in cases of great hunger a little curry powder mixed with the food or without the drink would greatly add to the comfort and sustenance to be derived from the limited grants of food which it was possible to starve out. Whether he was right or not as to the fact I do not know, but I do know that he said what did from a purely benevolent motive, and from a wish to make public anything which he had heard which might be useful to those who were trying to relieve the sufferings of the starving people. I am not surprised to hear that there were men then, as now, who twisted this simple incident to their own uses; but when a man in the position of a Cabinet Minister makes such a statement in such a way I feel that, in justice to my family and to the landlord class in general, I ought not to withhold this explanation. Let Mr. Chamberlain hit us as hard as he pleases, but let him not try and wound us with poisoned weapons."

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