

A N E S S A Y

on the

BEGINNINGS OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION,

Civil and Religious
from the middle of the Fourteenth Century
to 1517.

Per Aspera ad Astra.

1903



It is a fashion now-a-days, since Mr Symonds set the example, for writers on the Sixteenth Century to regard the Reformation as a phase merely of the Renaissance. As used by Hallam and the older historians, the term Renaissance was usefully and definitely employed in designating the great revival of learning and of art, which displayed itself after the expulsion of the Greeks from Constantinople. According to Mr Symonds, however, the word denotes a much wider movement. In language of somewhat vague import he describes the Renaissance as "a new birth to liberty - the spirit of mankind recovering consciousness and the power of self-determination, recognising the beauty of the outer world and of the body through art, liberating the reason in science and the conscience in religion, restoring culture to the intelligence and establishing the principles of political freedom." It may be doubted whether any advantage has been gained by departing from the older connotation. The question is, of course, entirely one of definitions and the convenience of terms. If all that is meant is that by a remarkable coincidence the revival of learning and of art, of scientific and of philosophic speculation, synchronized with a fresh and more successful effort to determine the respective spheres and inter-relations of Church and State; or even that these movements, arriving at the same point/

point of time on the stage of the world's affairs, in some measure came to the support of one another - no very serious objection may be taken to this access of meaning, which it is now insisted should be read into the term Renaissance; except that a useful word has been torn from a precise and well established usage to cover a generalization of no particular value. The danger, however, of this modern practice of hunting back for common origins, and of seeking to correlate things in some sort of philosophic unity, is that causes and effects in history are apt to be jumbled and misplaced. Hence we sometimes see the Reformation referred to as an off-shoot from the Renaissance, when with no great show of ingenuity it might be argued that the exact reverse was the truth. Broadly speaking, the Reformation may be described as the emancipation of Europe, or at any rate a great portion of it, from the bonds of the Church of Rome; an emancipation which involved civil as well as religious liberty. The history of that movement reaches back to a time far remote from the re-birth of learning and the restoration of art to its high place among the legitimate pleasures of mankind. In England, at any rate, the war between Church and State began long before the Renaissance and was waged for reasons of a purely practical nature. For upwards of a thousand years the fluctuations of/

of that great struggle form the most important part of European history.

From various causes, to be indicated presently, the Church and the State during the dark and Middle Ages became so closely interlaced that it is impossible to investigate the one apart from the other. For centuries the most important constitutional interests were in the hands of the clergy. The chief advisers of the king and the principal civil administrators were drawn from their orders; the framing of statutes at home and the conduct of diplomacy abroad formed an important part of their duties. It is easy at the present time to distinguish between the functions of the Church and of the State and to see that these are best performed by separate officials. In early times it was not so simple a matter to differentiate the Church and the State in this way. Nor would it have been wise had it been possible. The growth of a nation and the development of its various spheres of activity are analagous in some respects to the evolutionary processes of organic life. The rudimentary organism is dependent for the discharge of a variety of necessary functions on one or two members. In the more highly developed creatures these functional duties become more complex and numerous and are separated out and apportioned to new members and organs which have been called into existence through/

through exigent circumstances. The necessity which in the case of the undeveloped organism required that one member should perform several important functions has changed, and the very life of the organism becomes dependent on a more careful differentiation of duties and apportionment of them. This evolutionary process, as we trace it in the history of organic life, has been accompanied by fierce and deadly struggles, and without pressing the analogy we may see something like it in the prolonged and embittered contests which accompanied the efforts of the State to emerge from that more rudimentary condition in which so many of the vital interests of the nation were in the hands of the Church. In the body politic, the gradual differentiation of national duties and better distribution of these, provoked a variety of contests. The conflicting interests and ambitions of the king, the clergy, the barons and the people, produced all manner of combinations and opposing parties. But the struggles which divided the secular interests were in no instance so protracted, so extensive, so bitter as that which separated the clergy from the other parties in the State. For this there were specific and important reasons. The various conflicts which arose from time to time between the crown and the secular estates, or between rival parties within the estates themselves, were fought out inside the/

the limits of the kingdom. The grounds of quarrel were for the most part definite and not difficult to understand. All seculars were at least in theory subject to the same kind of fiscal burden and subject to national laws. But what makes the conflict between Church and State so different is that the clergy formed a part of a vast, if rather loosely knit organisation, which overspread all western Europe; and that they were divided from the rest of the nation by a different code of laws and by different fiscal burdens. The grounds of quarrel were, especially in the earlier stages, ill-defined and always liable to be obscured by the assertion of vague and vast claims of a spiritual nature. Any dispute which arose between the State and the Church could scarcely be settled within the Kingdom. Belonging to a great ecclesiastical organisation, the clergy in England could summon to their aid, the greater powers of the whole Catholic Church. In this way a quarrel between the Church and the State might at any moment become one of international importance. These contests were further aggravated by the Papal policy of enlisting the services of one monarch against another. Again, the results of victories secured by the Church in one nation, were often extended to other countries; and thus while the Church might be losing ground in one part of Europe, it might be winning/

ing a more than proportionate victory in another part. The position of the State was further complicated and indeed seriously weakened, by the fact that for long it did not see a way to repudiate the spiritual side of the Church's claim. In its endeavours to check the encroachment of the Church upon the constitutional rights of the Crown, the State was liable to be confronted by this assertion of the higher rights of the spirituality; and it was not easy to grapple effectively with an adversary that could resort to such a weapon as excommunication. In the initial stages of the struggle it was this peculiar mixture of spiritual and temporal claims which most embarrassed the State. ~~And~~ It was not until through the operation of various causes men began to grasp the conception that the Church's assertion of its spiritual supremacy was no justification of its temporal claims, that effective opposition was offered to the ecclesiastical power. And this recognition of the distinction between civil and religious rights, between the province of a church and of a state, was accompanied by a clearing perception of the right of a nation to be a self-contained unit in respect of all its organizations both civil and religious. The inherent incompatibility between the ambitious claims of the mediæval Church and the healthy development of nationalism in the/

the various countries of Europe was for long obscured because of the excellent and indeed indispensable services which the higher ecclesiastics rendered to the State, and also because the Church was slow to provoke open conflict with the civil power. It was largely by the exercise of an unparalleled tact, by a shrewd perception of the times and occasions when to press her claims and when to waive them, that the Church succeeded in twining herself so closely round the whole body politic.

Another striking feature in the long struggle between the clerical and secular estates was the many-sidedness of the ecclesiastical power and the variety of forms which the contest assumed in consequence. Sometimes conflict arose between the king and the Papacy, sometimes between the government and the home clergy, sometimes between the people and the friars and monasteries, sometimes between the nobles and the higher ecclesiastics. Surveying the long duel from the vantage ground of a later age, we can see that this provocation of opposition from all sections of the community was in reality due to the fact that the claims which the Church was putting forward were opposed to the growth of a strong and closely knit national life.

II.

The growth of the civil and ecclesiastical powers of the Church of Rome throughout Europe is one of the most impressive facts in human history. The majestic conception of welding all Europe into one great spiritual commonwealth, raised above and indeed dominating all earthly kingdoms, seems to have first fully shaped itself in the mind of Hildebrand. But in the development of the Church during the preceding centuries practically all the claims which Gregory VII. put forth can be discerned emerging at different times and places. The Church, however, was too loosely knit together to make good in any permanent way these claims; and it was because Hildebrand effected so great a work in drawing into an organised whole the scattered parts of the Church that he marks an epoch in the development of the ecclesiastical power. During the noon-day of the Papal dominion, which lasted throughout the Thirteenth Century, "Rome inspired", as Hallam says, "all the terror of her ancient name. She was once more the mistress of the world and kings were her vassals." If we would adequately appreciate the magnitude of the task to which the reformers of the Fourteenth and Sixteenth Centuries put their hands, it is necessary/

necessary to refresh our memories of the vast proportions of that ecclesiastical organisation. Briefly stated, the powers to which Innocent ~~the~~ III. attained comprised those of supreme ruler of the Church, controller of all earthly princes, "general arbiter of differences and conservator of peace throughout Christendom." His position was that of an absolute dictator over Church and State alike. The kings of England, France, Aragon, Castille, Portugal, Armenia, Bulgaria and the Emperor himself were all in turn brought to acknowledge his supremacy. That a claim so extravagant as this should have been put forth and so acquiesced in, is only to be understood when we remember, that at that time half at least of the land of Europe was in the possession of the Church. The number of those who came under the designation, and enjoyed the immunity and privileges, of the clergy was enormous. Not only were all churchmen strictly speaking, regulars and seculars, bishops and abbots, monks and friars down to the veriest clerk in minor orders, participators in the benefits of clergy; but also all those who had joined in any of the Crusades and even all who could read and write. These men, throughout the various countries of Europe, owed no strict allegiance to any secular monarch; they stood outside the operations of the laws of the various lands in which they/

lived, and had besides courts of their own before which laymen had constantly to appear. They reaped the benefits of the civil administration, but were liable to none of its burdens. As clerks, teachers, diplomatists, administrators, and as preachers, pardoners, confessors and general intermediaries between the souls of men and God, they wielded an enormous influence over the minds and lives of the whole body of the people.

It is plain that an organisation like this must have played a vastly important part in the growth of western civilization. For upwards of a thousand years it was a prime factor in all social and political development. What then was the nature of its influence? One thing ought to be grasped at the outset. The conditions of Europe must have lent themselves readily to the growth of this great ecclesiastical fabric. It is only a limited view which leads to the conception that such an institution could have been built up solely by force, by cunning, by greed of power and by the mere exercise of ambitious schemes. The Church in every sphere of its operations had the sanction and approval of men at the time. And however much we may regret its shortcomings, however much we may be compelled to debit it with unworthy motives and unrighteous acts, there can be no doubt whatever/

whatever that in the turbulent times, which extended between the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of the nations of modern Europe, it did a great and beneficent work which it is hard to see could have been done otherwise. The services which the clergy rendered in aiding legislation and administration and, in this connection, in tempering the rule of tyrannical monarchs is unquestioned. They were often the only shelter which the people had against a harsh ruler. It was a gain to right government in these disorderly times that so much power was in the hands of men who from the nature of their sacred calling, were more or less to combine the conduct of public affairs with a consideration for the holy injunctions of the Christian religion.

In the earlier years of its developing power the Church came into sharp conflict with feudalism. Calixtus ~~II.~~ II. absolutely prohibited ecclesiastics from rendering services to laymen on account of their benefices. It was even declared to be a dishonour to prelates to put their hands hallowed by contact with the body and blood of Christ within the hands of impure laymen in act of homage. "It is evident", says Hallam, "that such a general immunity from feudal obligation for an order who possessed nearly half the lands in Europe struck at the root of those institutions by which the fabric/

fabric of society was principally held together."

Of greater importance for our present purpose was the attitude which the Church assumed towards the young nationalities that arose out of the debacle of the Roman Empire. It cannot be doubted that in the earlier stages of development of countries like France and England the part which the Church played was distinctly helpful. It proved a centralising and unifying agency. In England this was especially marked. What heathenism, community of language and custom, war and conquest had failed to do, the organised Church of Christ accomplished. It helped the divided tribes of England to realise a national unity. For a variety of reasons the Church in Saxon England escaped dangers which beset it on the Continent. It played a more truly national part and was not called upon ^{to} involve itself in merely secular squabbles. The bishops were not, as in France and ~~England~~ ^{the Empire}, aggressive local rulers. A sphere for the exercise of their power and influence was found in the great council of the nation. Another evil which at this early stage the Church in England was almost wholly free from was Papal interference. No doubt the geographical isolation of the country had a good deal to do with this. Could this remoteness have preserved England in succeeding ages from the operations of Papal/

Papal ambition, the course of her history would have been greatly different. With the growth of the papal power under the Hildebrandine regime the helpful character of the Church's influence upon the growth of nationality disappeared. In surveying the course of European history from the vantage ground of a later age, we can see that from the Eleventh Century down to the Reformation the most persistent and powerful foe to national growth was the Catholic Church of Rome. In England from the time of the later Norman kings, the thwarting power of the Papacy begins to make itself felt. In the quarrels which arose between Anselm and William II. and his brother Henry, and between Becket and Henry II., we see emerging, so far as England is concerned, that incurable duality of Church and State which was to distract Europe for centuries. Without the connection which existed between the English Church and the Roman See, in other words, had the Church of England not been a portion of the Catholic Church of Europe, the fight between Church and State might never have occurred, or have been of a minor character and of short duration. As it was the State in England had not only to reduce the national Church to its proper place in the body politic; but had to resist and overthrow the wider power of the Papacy.

III.

In each of the countries of Europe opposition to the power of the Catholic Church took a distinctive form from the temper of the people and the general character of their national institutions. In England the movement was from the first, mainly political and constitutional in its nature; although neither the moral nor the doctrinal side of the question was neglected. Still with the English people it was mainly a question of Nationalism versus Romanism. And the reason is not far to seek. In no country had the sense of nationality more strongly asserted itself than in England. Cut off by the sea from the Continent the English people were held together better than the peoples of the Continent, and were thus more favourably situated for the growth of that community of interest on which nationality supports itself. It is rather an interesting coincidence, if it is nothing more, that the period in which the Church influence in England grew up synchronised with the time when nationalism was at its lowest ebb.

In various ways the ecclesiastical policy of William the Conqueror tended to draw the national church closer to the Roman hierarchy; and although William yielded no part of his sovereign/

sovereign rights over the Church, nor exempted Churchmen from the ordinary laws, he made the way easier for the successful assertion of the Papal claim in succeeding reigns and for the growth of clerical immunities. By far the most important step he took was the erection of new ecclesiastical courts. It is to this source that many of the subsequent evils of the clerical power in England can be traced. It was, although not seen at the time, an arrangement which produced important social and constitutional anomalies. Instead of one law, one jurisdiction for all, there grew up two, whose interests were often divergent and at times antagonistic. During the Twelfth Century the Canon Law developed apace on the Continent and its provisions became applicable to all Church courts. In this way a mass of business of a varied kind was introduced into these courts, business which ~~was~~ ~~only~~ affected ^{not only} the clergy but also the laity in matters which touched closely their local and domestic life. Out of these courts sprang the practice of appeals to the Pope. Thus there was introduced and developed in England a new code of laws which tended to prevent the growth of national solid^{arity}~~ity~~, and which gave rise to the practice of appeals to an external authority.

During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries in England, the history of the relations of Church and State is the record of/

of the growth of the power and independency of the clergy; and on the other hand ^{of} the efforts of the State to assert the rights of the crown. In that struggle the protagonists on the Church side were Anselm and Becket. The long conflict between Anselm and William II. and Henry I. is instructive both as illustrating the advance of the Church power and the difficulties under which constitutional government grew up. When the power of the State was represented by a man of the violent type of William II., and the Church by a holy scholar like Anselm, the true inwardness of the contest was and is apt to be missed. The State indeed was put in a false position by men like William Rufus, and occasion was offered to the Church, in combating the evils of passion and misrule, to entrench itself in a stronger position against the constitutional rights of the State. So long as the Church could stand forth as the champion of the oppressed, and so long as the state was identified with tyranny and unrighteousness, the growth of the Church's power was inevitable. In two ways the constitutional rights of the Crown were invaded by the principles laid down by Anselm. In the first place "the prescription of feudalism was broken" when, by surrendering the right of investiture, the king tacitly admitted that the spiritual powers of the bishops were not his to give.

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In itself that would have been a trifling concession; but it carried with it far-reaching consequences. It is from this time that we date the commencement of those appeals to the Pope which had been sternly resisted by William the Conqueror. By the admission that the Pope held an appellate jurisdiction over so important an institution in the country as the Church a long step was taken towards erecting the Church into an imperium in imperio. It was also legalising the right of a foreign power to interfere with the constitution of England. In considering from the standpoint of constitutional history the results of Anselm's quarrel with William and Henry it is not necessary to deal with the question whether Anselm was justified in his action by the spiritual needs of the time. It may be true that great harm was done to the interests of religion when the uncontrolled appointment of bishops was in the hands of a man of the stamp of William. It may be true that against the abuse of that power there was no redress, no appeal to be made anywhere in the land, and that it was natural that a man in Anselm's position should seek to stay these evils by appeal to the Court of Rome, to the Vicar of St. Peter. On the other hand it might be urged that there is little reason to think that Anselm would have attempted to seek redress of the evils complained of by appeal to the nation/

nation even if such appeal had promised success. Anselm had been captivated by the Hildebrandine conception of the Church. He saw the Church a great consolidated power raised above the local conflicts of nations, above the shifting passions of men, a refuge against the brutality of the age, a judgment seat, "an independent throne of truth and justice". It proved, as Mr Church says, "the grandest and most magnificent failure in history." But what more concerns us here is the fact that through Anselm's successful struggle with two strong-willed kings of England the power and independency of the Church was greatly strengthened.

During the fifty years which intervened between the death of Anselm and the struggle between Henry II. and Becket over the question of clerical immunities the power of the Church steadily advanced. The change in the attitude of the clergy, since the days of the Conqueror, is well marked when a papal commissioner could meet the threats of Henry II. with the words: "Do not threaten, my Lord, for we are a court which is accustomed to give commands to emperors and kings." A development of more immediate and of more constitutional interest was the growth in power and scope of the Church courts. So long as the Canon Law remained undeveloped, and so long as the ecclestical courts were animated by national custom and feeling/
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feeling, there was no conflict between them and the claims of the ordinary courts. But with the development of the Canon Law and the drawing closer of the English Church to the Continent trouble began. In the Twelfth Century the province of the secular law was not well defined; there was a region of debatable land between the civil and ecclesiastical courts. Through the development of the Canon Law the church courts had been drawing more and more under their jurisdiction. It is easy to see how, claiming as they did to exercise judgment over all cases of oaths and promises, wills and marriages, the church courts could push these rights so as to embrace a wide variety of matters touching at all points the life of the laity. How great these powers were, how vast their pretensions and how considerable were the immunities which the clergy enjoyed first became clear, when Henry, starting on his great work of centralising and codifying the laws of the land, came into sharp collision with the clerical estate. In these matters the claim of the Church was clearly stated by Becket. He invaded the whole principle of nationality when he asserted that the "customs" of the Church were of greater authority than any customs of the kingdom, and that obedience to the Canon Law was more important than conformity with any traditional national law. Carried to its logical consequences/

consequences such a theory would have rendered national growth impossible. The Church, however, never pushed its claims in a purely high-handed and uncompromising spirit except where it was sure of success. In the hands of fiery zealots like Becket the policy of the Church would have provoked universal resistance. The Papacy was always ready to yield for the time when it felt the forces of opposition becoming dangerously strong. It was satisfied to wait for a more convenient season; and the field of its operations was so extensive that it scarcely happened that opposition was so strong in all directions that it could not be extending its power in some land.

The evils likely to arise from the uncompromising insistence by Becket on the privileges and immunities claimed by the clergy were for the time obscured, because the Church courts at that time had claims to popular regard. They were less harsh in their judgments than the lay courts and often proved a shelter to the weak against the tyranny of the strong. The clergy had not yet forfeited the respect of the people as in the Fourteenth Century they did. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that Henry was moving along the right lines of constitutional development in seeking to curtail the privileges of the ecclesiastical courts and the immunities of the clergy, and in striving to submit the whole body/

body of the people to an organised legal system.

It must, however, not be forgotten that the alliance between the king and clergy which had been cemented by Langfranc had not been completely broken by the quarrel of Anselm, or even by that of Becket. The king's chief advisers still continued to be drawn from the clergy. This close alliance was, however, greatly weakened in the reign of John, a reign of great consequence in the relations of Church and State. The chief point to be noted is that the Church, through John's base surrender to Innocent III., attained the fulfilment of its highest ambitions. The kingdom became a fief of the Papal See. So far as its formal claims went the Church could gain nothing more. Its practical grasp over the kingdom, however, never realised to the full the formal acknowledgment of its power. And the reason is clear. Innocent's victory was over John and not over the English nation. It is pretty certain too that had John not estranged and embittered the people against him, had he had the united support of the ~~nation~~ *nation* behind him, instead of standing alone, he would not have been worsted in his struggle with Innocent. This illustrates what becomes plain again in Edward I.'s reign, that in this conflict between Church and State the State could not win until it was supported by the nation as a whole.

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During the period between the accession of Henry II. and the commencement of Edward I's reign it must be allowed that, although the Church was securing for itself a position in the country which produced evils in later times, yet in several ways it furthered the cause of constitutional progress. Even in the times of Anselm in asserting its rights in the face of tyrannous kings, the Church pointed the way to the nation to vindicate its rights in other directions; and it also proved to the people that the violence of princes could be successfully opposed. On the purely administrative side it was a gain to civil progress that affairs should have been in the hands of men like Lanfranc, Roger of Salisbury, even Becket, and Hubert Walter and Stephen Langton. In different ways they laboured to bring into the State something of the same order which existed in the great ecclesiastical organisation. Although looking back we can trace in some measure the evils of the over-weening power of the Church to the action of these men, still the good they did in their day is to be credited to them. It is worthy of note also that in the important work of re-shaping both the local and central administrative systems the Church organisation offered patterns on which the changes could be made. Such results were no little gain to the cause of constitutional government; but/

but they were forthcoming because of the rough spirit of the age and the want of a proper system of constitutional government. In proportion as the times changed in respect of both these features the beneficent influence of the Church waned.

The importance of Edward I's reign in regard to the relations of Church and State lies primarily in the fact that he more than any of his predecessors on the throne consolidated the people, strengthened those forces of the national life which were making for unity, and which, finding the clerical interests and policy a hindrance, had to seek some way of reducing the power of the Church. It is from this time that we date the commencement of that long course of legislation against the Papal claims, which stretches down to the Reformation. Indeed, for various reasons it may be said that Edward's reign marks the commencement of the prelude to the Reformation. Of course, all the causes which brought about that great break in our history are not visible; but many are. The impossibility of reconciling the claim of the clergy with a healthy and broad national growth was becoming clear. The petition of the laity to the Parliament at Carlisle against the Papal exactions indicates that the encroachments of the Pope had now gone so far as to alarm the people. The age of great ecclesiastical statesmen was over, and Boniface VIII. was making/
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ing plain the degradation which had fallen upon the Papacy since the days of Innocent III. It was a time in which the spiritual glamour that had surrounded the Papacy and the Church generally was beginning to fall away, thus allowing men to see how much of a purely material nature lay in all the claims and pretensions of the clergy. It is also significant that many of the clergy in England were beginning to resent the encroachments of the Papacy. This opposition of the home clergy to the Roman curia was a by no means unimportant factor in strengthening the national resistance to the Pope. The whole trend of Edward's dealings with the clergy would tend to impress upon the nation that the powers of the clergy required curtailment, and would naturally lead citizens to turn a critical eye upon the Church as a whole. Moreover by pursuing a policy by which he sought to check the growth of the Church estates; to define strictly the province of the Church courts in temporal matters; to prevent superiors abroad from levying taxes on English religious houses; to insist on the constitutional rights of the king when these came into conflict with the injunctions of the Pope; - Edward gave the Church its first distinct warning that the civil authority must be supreme in the land.

One important point, however, is that in the struggles between the Church and the State the strength of the State was to a very large extent represented by one man in the person/

son of the king. Edward's appeal to Clement to absolve him from his oath to observe the Charters shows that there was little hope of finally checking the pretensions of the Papacy and of the clergy generally, when a king of Edward's independence to serve his own ends invoked the aid of the Pope in a matter which concerned the Crown and Parliament of England. Effective resistance to the Church power in all its ramifications required the support of the united nation. During the reigns of Edward II. and Edward III. we see the two factors advancing which were to bring about the first serious effort in England to grapple with the whole question of the relations of Church and State. These were the growth of the power of the Commons into the most powerful estate in the land, and the gradual corruption and degradation of the clergy. About the middle of the fourteenth Century a variety of causes combined to force the problem prominently before the nation. Before tracing these in some detail it is of importance to take stock of the position which the clergy held at this time in England, and to consider in what ways the power of the Church was invading the rights of the other sections of the nation, and generally in what respects constitutional progress was being hampered.

Ever since the days of John the kingdom had been theoretically at least a fief of the Roman See; and although in reality/

reality there was little or no validity in this relation, at the same time it unquestionably weakened the position of the Crown in resisting the encroaching interference of the Popes. On the other hand it made easier and gave an appearance of regularity to appeals of English monarchs to the Popes when the papal aid was of use in confronting the claims of the barons and the commons. This nominal over-lordship carried with it the right to a tribute which continued to be paid up to the year 1333. By various other means large sums of money found their way to the papal exchequer. A drain of this kind upon the resources of the nation was in itself a check upon national prosperity and reacted upon the economic condition of the people. The sums of money which the king drew from the clergy, through the support of the Pope, enabled him to dispense at certain critical times with appeals to parliament. In this way he managed to evade the commons, who through their growing power over taxation and control of the public revenues had been able to press for the removal of various social and political grievances. Nothing in the long run could stay the advance of this power of the commons, nor could any obstacle which depended on the friendly relations of the crown and the papacy be at all enduring. It suited both Pope and king at times to play into each other's hands for selfish interests/

interests; but it often happened that their interests were entirely opposed to one another. That the king, however, could from time to time seek aid in this way from a foreign potentate possessing such a peculiar and powerful hold upon the internal affairs of the nation, was a serious hamper to constitutional progress.

In another way the relations of the papacy to the Church in England acted prejudicially upon the constitution and its peaceful development. By the usual process of slow and cautious encroachment the papacy had by the middle of the Fourteenth Century secured not merely an appellate jurisdiction, but also the patronage over and virtual appointment of all offices, both high and low in the Church of England. This was done by the undue exercise of the rights of provision and reservation. Inasmuch as the clergy formed a powerful estate in the constitution the fact that their election should depend to such an extent on a foreigner was detrimental to the constitution.

The peculiar position which the clergy as a whole held in the country was inimical to constitutional progress. We need only repeat that at this period, when various causes were forcing upon the nation a reconsideration of the relations of church and state, in outward appearance at any rate the position/

position of the clergy was stronger and securer than ever. They formed a completely organised body, possessing the right of legislating for itself and of taxing itself, having its recognised assemblies, judicature and executive. To a very large extent it constituted a foreign body within the constitution, an imperium in imperio. The wealth of the clergy at this time was enormous. A few years later it was estimated that the monies which the Papacy drew from the Church of England amounted annually to five times as much as was received into the royal exchequer. The possession of so great a share of the wealth of the country, especially when the clergy denied the right of the crown to tax them, was a serious weakening of the national resources.

In one other respect, and that by no means the least, the Church was responsible for hindering progress in the land. It no longer ministered in any adequate way to the spiritual needs of the people. The wave of religious zeal, which had followed the coming of the friars, had spent itself; even those ministers of mercy, who had followed in the steps of the saintly Francis, had fallen into a state of degradation all the more striking because of the lofty ideals with which the order had set out on its holy mission. In *Piers the Plowman* a lurid light is thrown upon the state of the clergy at this time, and the genial satire of Chaucer and strenuous denunciations of Wiclif bear corroborative testimony.

IV.

It is apparent that by the middle of the Fourteenth Century the condition of the clerical estate and its general position and constitution ~~was~~^{were} in need of a thorough overhauling, if national progress, both civil and religious, was to go forward. It is not merely a coincidence that at this time a cry for reform arose within the Church itself, joining and supporting the loud clamour of the secular estates. Earnest men were becoming alarmed at the state of religion and morality. The presence in England at this critical juncture of a great man whose mind was lofty enough to see both sides of the question, ~~was~~^{both} the requirements[^] of the Church and of the State, gave the reform movement a forward lift the effects of which were felt down to the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century. John Wiclif has been called the "Morning Star" of the Reformation; but he was far more than a herald of the good times to come. He disentangled the problem in a way that none of his precursors had ever done; and laid down broad constitutional principles which were the foundation of the Reformation. But the great work which Wiclif did would scarcely have been possible had not a variety of political and social causes converged at this time to force/

force upon the country the question of the Church's position in the land.

A powerful factor in compelling the nation to turn an enquiring eye at this time upon all its institutions proved to be the French war. In the earlier stages the brilliant successes which attended the English army in France concealed from the nation the fact, which it was made to feel bitterly later on, that in attempting to conquer and to hold the kingdom of France it had undertaken a task beyond its strength. For years the people cheerfully supplied armies and funds to support the great enterprise. The slowly gathering sense of nationality received a remarkable quickening. Patriotism was excited to the highest pitch. It was natural enough that at such a time the position of the clergy should excite the peculiar attention of the nation. The people were bearing a heavy burden of taxation not uncheerfully; but the clergy, although possessed of immense wealth, pled the privileges of their order and sought to be exempted. This attitude of the clergy in a time of great national urgency was made more intolerable by the fact that at that time the Head of the Church, the Prince of Christendom, was dwelling on the French border and, as Englishmen suspected, aiding and abetting their enemy. From the Church of England immense sums of money were passing over to the Papal Court at Avignon and it was/

was a natural suspicion that part of the English wealth was being used to thwart the armies of England in France. The mismanagement of the war in the later sixties and early seventies raised doubts as to the advisability of allowing so large a share of the management of national affairs to remain in the hands of the higher ecclesiastics. This feeling was doubtless fomented and engineered by John of Gaunt and his party; but nevertheless it was seriously entertained by a large section of the people. There were lawyers and laymen of trained intelligence fit and willing to undertake the secretarial work of the state that was still monopolised by the clergy.

It was unfortunate for the Church that while public attention was being directed upon it in this way the moral and spiritual condition should have been so deplorable. From the higher ecclesiastics the cause of religion received no stimulus. The bishops were men of the world, immersed in public affairs and occupied mainly in defending their position of ascendancy in the state. They gave little or no attention to the condition of their dioceses and the conduct and teaching of their priests. They neglected the administration of the ecclesiastical courts and complaints were loud at the frequent miscarriages of justice. A variety of corrupt/
rupt/

rupt practices sprang up around the institution of the confessional and the powers of absolution which were given to the friars. These evils brought home to the people more than anything else the low state of morals into which the clergy had sunk. The pages of Langland and Chaucer bear ample testimony to the evil doings of the Summoners, Pardoners and Friar Confessors. The peace and sanctity of many a household was invaded by these wolves in sheep's clothing. The easy way in which absolution could be bought reacted with disastrous effect upon the morals of the people themselves. Through the abuses of the Church courts and the confessional large sums of money passed into the hands of the clergy. Simony, pluralism and absenteeism were rampant over the whole field of ecclesiastical appointments. The Pope in Avignon openly trafficked in English benefices and neither king nor bishop raised a voice against the practice. In the parishes throughout England religion was badly administered and not seldom neglected altogether. In most cases both advowson and parsonage with all its tithes and dues belonged to some monastery. As a consequence of the avaricious spirit of the monks the parish priests were wretchedly paid and those who were elected were too often illiterate and incompetent. Sometimes no appointment was/

was made at all and the tithe went undiminished to the coffers of the monastery, while the parish was left without a religious mentor of any kind. When the living was in the hands of some worldly bishop things were no better. The effect of the Black Death had been to impoverish the country districts and to make it impossible for the parishioners to do much for their underpaid priests. Many of these impecunious priests forsook their duties to dwell in the towns where money was to be made.

Persones and parisch prestes pleynd hem to the bischop
 That here parissches were pore sith the pestilence tyme
 To haue a lycence and a leue at London to dwell,
 and Syngen there for symonye for silver is swete.

Others resorted to corrupt methods of augmenting their scanty stipends, such as letting their rectories to laymen to be used as taverns. In these circumstances it was not unnatural that the parish priests should have at times ranged themselves with the people and even led armed attacks upon the monasteries. By the middle of the Fourteenth Century the monasteries themselves had ceased to exert any helpful influence upon the religious life of the nation. They were neither the homes of wise and saintly abbots, nor the schools of learning they once had been. It would be unjust however to/

to describe them as "sinks of iniquity," as Mr Froude has done. The monks of the Fourteenth Century were more lazy and avaricious than profligate. Narrowness of sympathy, as Mr Trevelyan points out, was their most serious fault; and the glaring uselessness of the monkish life brought contempt upon the once venerated abbeys. The monastery alone engrossed the monks' attention and his main activities were engaged in maintaining and if possible in augmenting the vast estates which belonged to his House. The territorial possessions of the monasteries at this time were very extensive and gave rise to an economic and social evil which swelled the discontent of the people. Throughout England borough and town life was increasing, and a wise policy, inherited from the Norman kings, guided the Crown in granting facilities to these new communities to consolidate themselves and to manage their own affairs. But not seldom towns sprang up round the abbeys and on the abbey lands, and friction arose between the ~~m~~municipal magistrates and the abbey dignitaries. The abbots refused to grant to these nascent towns charters of liberty; they claimed to have the right of interfering with the magistrates in the discharge of their municipal duties; in short they strove to subject these townships which had sprung up on their land to a sort of feudal rule.

The/

The immediate consequence of this attitude of the monasteries was to cripple and stunt the growth of town life, and to produce a deep discontent amongst the mercantile classes. On another side the clerical estate laid itself open to the hostile criticism of the people. The country was swarming with clerks in minor orders, many of whom engaged in every sort of secular work; while a large proportion loafed about and sorned on the people. Idleness bred the worst of vices amongst them, and the records of the spiritual courts, where they were leniently dealt with, testify to the frequency of their criminous acts. It was a perpetual source of heart-burnings amongst the people that these 'tonsured devils' should be protected by their shaven crowns from the severer penalties of the ordinary courts.

The corruption and profligacy into which the clergy thus gradually sunk was certainly not the least of the causes which provoked the Reformation. In the opinion of some it was the most potent of all. It lay at the back of all other elements of opposition and gave a general support to the many cries against the clergy. It undermined their influence among those who took no alarm at the Church's widespread power. It was always there to mock the pretensions of the clergy. It was the principal factor in raising up a great body of public opinion, without the support of which no revolution can be successful/

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successful.

Out of this gathering body of public opinion against the clergy two movements arose which, although inspired by widely different motives and directed to very different ends, nevertheless coincided so far in seeking to limit the political power of the Church and to diminish its overgrown wealth. These were the agitation fostered by John of Gaunt for the confiscation of the Church lands and the curtailment of the political power of the clergy, and the reform movement initiated by Wiclif. It is one of the ironies of history that a mere political intriguer like Lancaster and a man of the earnest and lofty nature of Wiclif should have found themselves at this crisis in the nation's affairs in something like political partnership. It is probable that Wiclif first came into personal relations with John of Gaunt while engaged on the Embassy sent by the king in 1374 to Bruges to effect a settlement with the Pope regarding the number ^{of} aliens holding English benefices, illegal provisions and other matters of long-standing quarrel. At this time Lancaster was the most powerful noble in England, a man skilled in all the arts of political intrigue and the implacable foe of the Church party. To cripple the political power of the clergy and to plunder their endowments were the chief articles of his political creed. He was astute enough to see that considerable political capital/

capital might be made out of the views concerning Church lands which Wiclif had given expression to. It is probable too that in John of Gaunt Wiclif considered he had found a means of bringing about a separation of the Church from purely secular affairs. For some years after this something like a political alliance was maintained by them. Yet between a profligate schemer like Lancaster and a man of Wiclif's austere nature and high purpose there could be no real community of aim and interest. For a time, however, they seemed to find common ground in their desire to limit the Church more strictly to its own affairs. In the long run it proved a union out of which neither reaped any substantial benefit. In seeking to exploit the reputation and abilities of Wiclif, Lancaster had reckoned without his host. Steadily pursuing his own lofty ideals, Wiclif was not the man to run easily in any sort of political harness; and in no long time the Duke found himself embroiled in doctrinal squabbles which were a serious embarrassment to him in his political designs. Neither could Wiclif derive any real benefits from Lancaster. The times, indeed, were not yet ripe for the fulfilment of Wiclif's conception of a Church entirely separate from the secular administration of the country. So far as Wiclif himself was concerned, his connection with John of Gaunt was largely the means of precipitating/

ating the attack of the Church upon him and of diminishing his popularity.

The pre-Reformation movement centred so largely round the life work of John Wiclif that it is necessary to examine with some closeness the doctrines which were held by this remarkable man, and to consider the action which he took during this critical age in the relations of Church and State. "In John Wiclif", says Dr Lechler, "meet a multitude of converging lines from the centuries which preceded him; and from him again go forth manifold influences like wave pulses which spread themselves widely on every side, and with a force so persistent that we are able to follow the traces of their presence to a later date than the commencement of the German Reformation." We have in the preceding pages endeavoured to trace the rise of the Church power, to show how as time went on it came into conflict with the growth of national life, and how kings and parliaments strove to cope with the difficulty. In the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries the problem was attacked in a less conspicuous way in the interests not of the State but of the Church itself. Slowly yet surely the lesson was being learnt that the true interests of the Christian religion were being sacrificed by the absorption of the Church in state affairs.

One of the first men in England to dimly ^{see} ~~know~~ this had been Robert Grossetete, the ~~Abbot~~ ^{Bishop} of Lincoln. Impelled by "a godly solicitude for souls" he had striven to rouse the Church to a deeper sense of its sacred office and to rid itself of evils, which not only violated its divine sanction, but which were alienating it further from the people of England. But he never pierced to the root of these evils as Wiclif did. He called for no alteration in the beliefs of the Church; he denounced none of its superstitious doctrines, and only in a very partial way saw the grievous wrong that was being done, by a too intimate connection, both to the Church and the State. But in his whole-hearted advocacy of the doctrine that both Episcopate and Papacy existed for the glory of God and the good of God's Kingdom lurked, although he knew it not, the seeds of revolution.

Not less important was the growth, during the century preceding Wiclif's age, of a spirit of enquiry into those first principles on which the relations of Church and State are properly based. In the writings of Bracton, Occam, and Marsiglio of Padua there are striking indications of this trend in men's thoughts. It is, however, scarcely necessary for our present purpose to trace the contributions of these thinkers to the stream of reforming tendencies, since in the writings of their great successor all that was of value in their thought was gathered up/

up and formulated afresh with new and cogent arguments. In a way that none of his predecessors had done Wiclif grasped the question in its entirety. He was as zealous as Grossetete in his desire to purify the Church, and as emphatic as Edward I. in his assertion of the supremacy of the civil authority. He saw more clearly than Occam and Marsiglio into the hollowness of the Papal claim to a plenitudo potestatis, and was more convincing than Bracton in the way in which he defined the limits of the temporal and spiritual jurisdictions. But he far outstripped his predecessors in his reforming zeal. By his attack on Transubstantiation and its concomitant notion of the divine right of priests, by his general denunciations of sacerdotalism, by his assertion of the principle of national unity and the right of revolution, above all by his large-hearted efforts to educate the people in true religious conceptions, and so to lift them above the gross superstitions in which they were sunk, Wiclif gave to the slow gathering reform movement by far the most powerful stimulus it had yet received.

V.

There are abundant indications that John Wiclif played a part of great prominence in the political and ecclesiastical affairs of England in the latter half of the 14th Century. We trace his influence in the deliberations of Parliament, in councils of state, in the policy of the country during some twelve or fifteen years; but with the exception of what we see of him in a few out-standing and isolated episodes in his career, the man as a tangible figure eludes us. By a happy stroke of fortune we are better able to trace the growth of his mind and to frame a fairly complete picture of his thoughts and opinions during the years of his public activity. We cannot, however, *consider* ~~take~~ here the story of the preservation of a great part of his voluminous writings, through Jerome of Prague, Peter Payne and others. The fulness, indeed, of our knowledge of Wiclif's doctrines and opinions, through these so fortunately preserved writings, rather accentuates the paucity of our information regarding the outer facts and circumstances of his life. We ~~can~~ ~~do~~ know the heart and mind of the man so well that it is difficult to reconcile ourselves with the dimness and even darkness that overspreads so much of his public career. Prior to his appearance in the political arena of the metropolis, we know little/

little more than that he was an influential and honoured teacher at Oxford. Somewhere about the year 1324 he must have been born, apparently of a good Yorkshire family; and it is pretty certain that he entered Oxford between the age of 14 and 16. In his writings there is evidence of his earnest application to the various branches of learning which then comprised a university education; but until 1361, when we find him elected Master of Baliol College, no really indisputable circumstance of his career at Oxford emerges. To some extent, no doubt, this obscurity which overhangs Wiclif's life is accounted for by that lack of curiosity concerning personalia which is so characteristic of those early times; and to this one may add the entire absence of any egotism in Wiclif himself. But more potent factors were at work. The century which followed his death was full of restless and vague discontent, and it was the misfortune of Wiclif to have his name associated with malcontents, religious and social, in whose crude heresies and propaganda his pure and ardent thoughts had no part. In the blighting persecution which ultimately fell upon the Lollards, every effort was made to stamp out the writings and undo the work of the man whose name had become a rallying point for liberty of conscience and freedom of thought. His doctrines were condemned by the Council of Constance; and the Holy Catholic Church, which had shrunk from pressing home its attack upon the great reformer during his lifetime/

lifetime wrought a mean-spirited revenge by rifling his tomb and scattering his ashes upon the brook that flowed by his grave side. In the long run, however, justice is done to men of the stamp and achievement of Wiclif. During the past century his life and writings have been, both in England and on the Continent, subjected to much close and patient investigation. As a result his title to a foremost place not only in the records of England, but in that wider history of civil and religious liberty which belongs to no country in particular, has become more clearly recognised. It is not so generally recognised that he exerted a powerful influence in England on the political side and greatly furthered the cause of civil liberty. The tendency to regard the history of the state as separable from that of the Church has had much to do with this oversight. But up to the end of the 14th Century at least, Church and State are interlaced in a way which makes it impossible to treat either one or the other as an entirely separate institution. By the end of Edward III's reign, however, the bonds were relaxing, and one of the chief points of interest in considering Wiclif's place in history is to note how greatly his efforts helped to draw asunder those two institutions whose intimate connection had ceased to be an advantage to the nation. It is moreover a mistake to regard Wiclif as a man who, like Anselm, lived solely for the Church/

Church. In following him during the years in which he actively participated in national affairs, there is evidence of his deep-seated patriotism. No thoughtful man, indeed, could well have lived in England through the later part of Edward III's reign and not have been deeply moved by the dramatic changes through which the country was passing. During these years the nation drank deep both of the cup of success and of failure. It had been dazzled by the glitter of great victories abroad and the glowing reports of extensive possessions across the Channel. It bore the burden of taxation with a light heart. But in fifteen years from the Treaty of Bretigny all was in the dust. Every object in which the nation had rejoiced withered and drooped before the gale of adversity. Such sudden changes in the fortune of a people make nationality a reality and rouse men to consider the place and condition of their country. That Wiclif had deeply pondered the state of England during these years there can be no doubt. It is characteristic of his earnest spirit that he attributes the blight which had fallen on the prosperity of the country to the widespread corruption of the Church.

The life and practice of the Church, not ~~in~~ the untenableness of her doctrines, at first jarred upon Wiclif and moved him to start on his career as a reformer; and undoubtedly the chief motive which impelled him to engage so actively in the politics of/

of his age was a single-hearted desire to purify the Church, to make it a more effective instrument for urging men to godly living. Towards the close of his life he came to see that there was something rotten in the very heart of the Church and that nothing was to be hoped from it until a reform of the most radical kind had taken place. His point of attack shifted from the practice of the clergy to the doctrines on which the Church rested; and his later blows were aimed rather at the trunk itself than at the fruit it bore. Before Wiclif's time there had been reformers like Grossetete and Occam eager to purify the life of the clergy; but Wiclif was the first to see clearly that at the very core of the Church some disease existed from which was streaming the offensive matter that was staining and polluting not merely the life of the Church but of the whole nation. More important from the point of view of constitutional history is his clear perception of the truth that the Church is made for man and not man for the Church; that it is to be the guide and support of the spiritual life, not a tyranny grasping in its dead hand liberty of thought and action even in the field of civil affairs. He saw that the Church instead of strengthening and purifying the national life had become a pestilent encumbrance upon the progress of the country. In concerning itself so much with purely secular affairs/

affairs it had ceased to be, what he earnestly desired and considered it ought to be, an institution for fostering and propagating Christian truth and Christ-like living.

The circumstances surrounding Wiclif's first appearance in public life are much in obscurity. In 1366 Urban V., perhaps, as has been suggested, at the instigation of the French court, demanded payment of the tribute due under the agreement entered into by King John with ~~the~~ Innocent III. The arrears of thirty-three years were demanded. Urban could not well have chosen a more unfortunate moment to urge his claim. For years past the temper of the nation had been rising against the exactions and over-weening claims of the Papacy. Petitions had been presented to Parliament and Acts had been passed restraining the Pope's powers of interference. The spirit of reform was in the air. Arguments more telling than the reasonings of Marsiglio and Occam were at hand. The long continued war with its increasing burden of taxation, the paralysing effects of the Great Plague, and the labour difficulties which sprang from it; above all the suspicion that the Pope was in league with the King of France, proved more potent solvents to the papal pretensions than arguments drawn from the writings of heretical school-men. It only required someone to give clear and vigorous expression to these gathering thoughts.

The King had astutely referred the Pope's claim to Parliament; not, it may be surmised, from any real conviction on his part that Parliament alone had the right to deal with the matter. On more than one occasion before this time, Edward had allied himself with the Pope to thrust worthless favourites of his own into prominent places in the Church; and where it had suited his purpose he had been ready enough to make use of the papal authority. But Edward was by no means alone in his opportunism. The various political factions were all more or less engaged in a game of beggar my neighbour. Nothing, indeed, forces itself more upon one investigating the politics at the time than the low-flying aims of the contending parties. The clergy still clung with the utmost tenacity to their ascendancy in the State, and had, with much adroitness, made use of the national feeling against a French pope to oppose the papal claims for money and encroachments upon their rights of patronage. Their position in the country as a political force had so far been considerably strengthened. The nobles, on the other hand, were bent, not merely on ousting the Clergy from their supremacy in the State, but on diminishing their privileges and plundering their endowments. In the hands of the rival factions the King, in these years of weakening will and increasing profligacy, was a mere puppet. Behind and beneath/

neath lay the mass of the people seething with discontent, a force threatening to overthrow the equilibrium of the nicely balanced political parties. The demand of the Pope, however, in 1366 was for money, and the rival factions had no difficulty in closing their ranks to resist that claim. One voice only was raised in support of the Papacy, that of a monk who publicly named and challenged Wiclif to shew just cause why the Pope's demand should not be complied with. This public appeal to Wiclif would seem to indicate that by this time he was already in the front rank of national life. There is, indeed, reason to believe that in some capacity or other he actually sat in the Parliament of 1366. The answer which he put out, which purports to be a condensed report of certain speeches delivered by seven lords 'in a certain council', is remarkable for its vigour and broad constitutional spirit. Besides arguments specially fitting the occasion and others suitable as coming from one who describes himself as peculiaris regis clericus, one doctrine of far-reaching constitutional importance is emphatically asserted, a doctrine perhaps not wholly new, but one which had been long lost sight of. The lordship of all lands in the realm, he declares, is vested in the King who holds no divided title with the Pope. Underlying the argument is the conception that a nation must above all be a unity, /

unity, and that the legitimate head is the civic authority. This is the first of many blows aimed by Wiclif at that halting dualism of Church and State, which for a century past had been hampering the progress of the nation.

By 1376 the Church party was thoroughly alarmed at the combined attack made on their endowments and privileges by John of Gaunt and Wiclif, and at the menacing discontent of the people. With great adroitness they determined to strike at their enemy through Wiclif. By this they hoped to cripple the power of Wiclif, and to discredit Lancaster in the country by identifying his policy with heresy and revolutionary doctrine. How entirely political the object of this attack upon Wiclif was is shown by the fact, (pointed out by Dr Shirley), that there is not an article in the indictment but bears on the question of the hour. The appearance of Wiclif at St. Paul's to make answer to the charges brought against him, and the dramatic incident which brought the proceedings to an abrupt close, picturesque and interesting though they be, must not detain us here. At this moment Wiclif was perhaps the most prominent figure in English politics. In purity of purpose, no less than in vigour of intellect and force of character, he towers above the ^{wrangling partisans who made him to some extent the} shuttlecock of their sordid political game. It may be surmised that there was in Wiclif a certain simplicity, perhaps inseparable from all truly great natures; not, indeed, /

indeed, the simplicity which consists in a kind of amiable short-sightedness and liability to be over-reached. Wiclif was a man of most shrewd and sturdy commonsense. Yet there was something of the dreamer in him; something of that simplicity which comes from allowing the mind to dwell habitually upon the great and eternal issues of life. In the hands of designing politicians such a man is apt to become a tool.

Although the attack on Wiclif had failed, Lancaster's political influence had received a serious blow by the events in St. Paul's. Doubtless the Secular clergy were well satisfied at the discredit which had fallen upon the Duke and at the intense ill-feeling which had been manifested by the London mob at his interference. The Regular clergy, however, could not so easily see Wiclif go free. He had broached heresies they viewed with horror. He had accused them of flattery and hypocrisy; talked of them as men 'with red and fat cheeks and great bellies;' denounced them as sorners and idlers; had preached the unpalatable doctrine that while temporal lords might have a right to hold property churchmen had none. He had disparaged the notion of monasticism and proclaimed 'the superiority of an active over a devotional life.' Here was matter that could not be stomached. They appealed to the Pope, who was not slow to recognise the formidableness of/

of the movement initiated in England by the man who had already proclaimed the peccability of the head of the Church. Five Bulls were launched against him. In itself the elaborateness of this attack upon Wiclif is a striking testimony to the extraordinary position he had attained in the public life of England. The charges enable us to see clearly that by this time the struggle between Church and State had become sharply defined. The Pope was chiefly concerned at the direct challenge to his powers as the head of the Catholic Church of Europe; the English clergy at the attack upon their endowments and position as a political force in the country. The questions of religion and doctrine were secondary considerations. In the answer which Wiclif put forth, and in other of his writings dating from about this period, we get in all their maturity his views on the relations of Church and State. Endowments were, he contended, held in trust and carried with them sacred obligations. Where these obligations were shamelessly neglected the title to hold such endowments were forfeited. But he applies this doctrine with caution. "It is lawful," he writes, "for kings in cases limited by law to take away the temporalities from clergymen who habitually abuse them." The expression "in cases limited by law" deserves to be noted. For Wiclif's theory/



theory of 'Dominion in Grace' is certainly capable of, and probably was subjected to, much misrepresentation. It is, indeed, not easy to follow Wiclif in the turn of his argument where, after inculcating a doctrine which seems to lead to a species of communism subversive of all then existing institutions, he breaks away to warn men against rebellion, and preaches the duty of obedience even to wicked men. "God himself," he paradoxically exclaims, "must obey^e the Devil." The whole thing reads more like the speculative exercise of a scholastic mind than^v a practical remedy for the evils of the times. Be that as it may, from the tenor of his other and later writings it is certain that Wiclif never at any time advocated a policy of revolution and confiscation. To the long standing dispute, whether supreme power rested with the Pope or with the Emperor, he gave a simple, perhaps ideal yet wholly audacious solution by asserting that in the last resort sanction was to be sought from no earthly ruler, - but from God Himself. It is a mistake, however, to attempt to find in Wiclif's writings a theory of Church and State sharply defined and maintained without modification from first to last. Wiclif was a man who never ceased to learn and to adapt his opinions and beliefs to changing circumstances. This appears very clearly in his views regarding the Pope.

Until/

Until late in his life he wrote and spoke of the Papal office with a respect which is remarkable, considering the vigour with which he condemned the practice of the Papacy and upheld the authority of the King in face of the claims of the Pope. In civil affairs, he at no time admitted the authority of the Pope. The cardinal tenet of his theory of the Church is that it should be an institution wholly and solely devoted to teaching, and fostering the growth of, Christianity. Spiritual not temporal affairs should be its sole concern. Of this institution he recognised the Pope, at least until 1378, to be the sovereign head. On the other hand he upheld the office of the King as the fountain of Supreme authority in the State, and emphatically repudiated the claim of the Pope to exercise dominion over the kingdoms of the earth as well as over the Church. As far back as 1366, it is clear that he had firmly grasped the conception that the King as "the Vicar of God in things temporal" was bound to see that the worldly possessions of the church were properly administered. This clear recognition and forcible expression of the supremacy of the kingship, and its right to exercise authority over all things temporal, is Wiclif's most important contribution to the theory and development of constitutional government. It was, as Dr Shirley says, 'feudal in/

in conception'; inadequate in so far as it failed to rest kingly power on the sanction and free will of the people. There is, however, a limit to the extent to which a man can outstep his time and generation. Wiclif had gone far; but much had to be learnt in bitterness of spirit, before the theory of modern democracy could be reached. Yet other aspects of Wiclif's teaching and work connect him even with this latter conception of government. Freedom of thought, liberty of conscience, are essential to democracy. In sweeping aside the pretensions of the Papacy, in repudiating the priest's claim to mediate between God and the individual soul, in directing men to the study of the scriptures as the fountainhead of religious truth and authority, Wiclif set the nation well on the road to attain the blessings of free and untrammelled political institutions.

Early in 1378 Wiclif appeared at Lambeth Palace to answer the charges brought against him. It is a testimony to the purity of his political aims that at this juncture the widowed Princess of Wales, although engaged in thwarting John of Gaunt in his endeavours to get himself elected Regent, keenly interested herself in one whose name must often have been coupled with that of Lancaster's. On the eve of the day appointed for/

for the trial, a message was sent by the Princess forbidding the Bishops to pronounce sentence against Wiclif. But succour came not only from the very edge of the throne. In the midst of the deliberations the London mob broke in upon and ended the proceedings. This episode marks perhaps the highest point to which Wiclif attained in the popular favour. He had given clear utterance to the discontent and indignation of the populace at the unjust privileges extended to, and thoroughly abused by, the clergy. He had won favour with the King, the nobles and the commons by the sturdy patriotism with which he had repudiated the claims of the Pope, upheld the supremacy of the crown, and asserted the nationality of England. In a word he had for the time stood forth as the champion of the State against the Church. About this time, or shortly before the trial at Lambeth, Wiclif had been formally consulted as to the right of the Crown to call upon the Church to bear its share of the national expenditure. This had been a matter of long-standing dispute; but through a policy of 'give and take' both Crown and Church had avoided a clear decision on the constitutional question underlying the dispute. It had, indeed, received a rough settlement at the hands of Edward I.; who, by placing the clergy outside the protection of the law, had forced them into submission; but this could only/

only be an emergency solution of the difficulty. The constitutional question at issue was not answered, was scarcely formulated. At any rate until Wiclif's time the right of the clergy to exemption from civil burdens had received no serious challenge. The country's great need now forced the whole matter forward for reconsideration.

The question was complicated by the papal exactions which were then draining the country of enormous sums of money. The document which Wiclif drew up went to the root of the matter. There is no attempt at compromise. The fundamental point at issue is plainly faced. "The question is whether the kingdom of England under the pressing necessity of self defence may prevent the exportation of treasure, even when it is demanded by our Lord the Pope and under the pain of ecclesiastical censures." He waves aside the quibbles and expediences of canon, civil, and common law, and broadly bases his argument on the law of nature - the law of self-preservation. "England is a body - a body corporate, of which its three estates are the members" and must in the last resort look to its own state of well-being. With the Pope's claim he deals in a summary fashion. "The Pope has no right to ask for money, except as an alms for the purposes of charity, but charity begins at home and it would not be charity, but folly to/

to send abroad supplies for the want of which the country is perishing at home." Further the Pope is plainly told that if, instead of acting the part of a loving father and recognising the crying necessities of his faithful people in England, he should proceed to interdict and excommunication, "such pretended censures are not binding before God, nor does God forsake those who put their trust in Him rather than in men." The importance of these bold words goes far beyond the occasion of their utterance and immediate application to the situation in England. They raised the standard of revolt against that whole conception of the mediaeval Catholic Church as an institution overspreading Europe, independent of and indeed above the civic powers of the various nations. They appealed to the commonsense and patriotism of men; while the spirit of earnestness which animated them, the moderateness and reasonableness of the arguments, eased their way into the minds of the faithful laity. The danger at this time of a complete subjection to the Papacy of civic authority throughout Europe was by no means so imaginary as might be supposed. Everywhere civil and political liberty was languishing. To Wiclif belongs the credit not only of having raised a clear and emphatic protest against the subjugation of the State to the Church, but also of having grounded his objection on constitutional/

stitutional principles applicable to other countries than his own.

From this time onwards Wiclif's political influence waned. His prominence in national affairs had been to some extent rather the result of circumstances than of any keen desire on his part to engage in public life. Designing politicians to serve their own end had encouraged him to seek in secular legislation a remedy for the existing evils in the Church. Especially had he hoped through the co-operation of the Duke of Lancaster to purify the Church by diminishing its overgrown endowments. So long as the Pope remained on French soil, Wiclif's attacks on the Papacy had pleased the people. His sturdy patriotism and fearless assertion of the right of a nation to look to its own interest as a whole, before extending privileges to any single class, won him friends throughout the country. But after 1378 a great change came over the political situation. The influence of the Duke of Lancaster had been eclipsed, and it is probable that Wiclif had by this time ceased to hope for any reform in the Church through political means. The attack on the property and privileges of the clergy had been a failure; and the miserable outcome of the effort to put down the abuses which had grown up round the privilege of Sanctuary, must have convinced/

convinced Wiclif how little was to be expected from the civil authority. With the re-establishment of the Papal Court in Rome much of the antipathy which had been entertained against a French pope disappeared. But while the people were thus inclining to resume their attitude of reverence towards the head of the Church, events were leading Wiclif further in the opposite direction. The Great Schism had profoundly affected his attitude towards the Papacy. Up to this time, although he had rebutted with vigour the overweening claims of the Pope, his language had been tempered by respect for the papal office. But the miserable display of intrigue, selfishness, and lust of earthly power on the part of the two claimants swept from his mind the last shred of respect for the Papacy. Henceforth he became the uncompromising foe of the Pope. He now saw clearly that from within and not from the outside must reform in the Church come. To this internal reform Wiclif now turned his attention.

Wiclif's views in regard to Church doctrine take their origin in his intensely vivid realisation of the intimate relation existing between God and the individual soul. God is the creator, man the creature. God is the Lord, man the servant. Lordship and service are implied in the relation. It is a theory feudal in conception, except in one important point/

point: Each man holds directly of God. In the light of this guiding principle Wiclif developed his theory of the Church and came to enunciate doctrines which are in essence the underlying conceptions of the later Reformation movement. It followed naturally from his fundamental idea that each believer had immediate access to God, that he refused to recognise the need of any intermediate priest. He believed that each man could be his own priest. This is among the most important principles which Wiclif proclaimed, and is, as Dr Lechler states, one of the points which distinguishes Wiclif's from any other system of the Middle Ages. It was a protestant doctrine, for it struck at the very root of the hierarchical privilege by declaring the equality of all men in the sight of God. It swept away the pretension of the Roman Catholic Church that the clergy are above the laity, and that it is in the nature of things that the former should govern and the latter obey. It was but another step in his argument to declare that Christ alone was the true head of the Church. In Wiclif's opinion the office of Pope was no necessity. Still he held that it was a convenience if properly filled, and till late in his life he spoke with respect of the Papacy. In the end, as we have already noted, he came to think differently. He had not at any time admitted the infallibility of the Pope or the plenitudo potestatis/

potestatis of the Pope, and in view of the conduct of Urban VI. and Clement VII. he denounced the whole institution of the Papacy, and declared the Pope to be a veritable devil's limb. Harmonising with these views is his idea that the Church consisted not necessarily of the clergy alone, but of the whole body of the elect. This was distasteful doctrine to the clergy. It implied not only that the Church embraced laymen, but that no matter how high the office a man might hold in the Church, if he were living a sinful life he could not be amongst the elect. The views which Wiclif held respecting the relations of the laity and the clergy were equally radical. When the clergy failed to perform their duties and gave themselves to evil ways the laity had the right to withhold the revenues of the Church. Underlying this is the notion that the laity have a right to subject the clergy to scrutiny, criticism and judgment. The old Franciscan theory that upon the mendicants only rested the obligation of poverty was developed by Wiclif so as to include all the clergy. The true doctrine of the Church in his view was that the life of the clergy should be one of service not one of dominion. Such a conception was right in the teeth of the long cherished ambition of the Papacy to win for the Church temporal as well as spiritual supremacy. It was moreover the basis of a policy/

policy of disendowment. Incidentally in the course of developing these root ideas Wiclif flung out, chiefly by way of illustration, such notions as that sinful priests could not administer the sacraments, that Christ did not institute the ceremonies of the Mass, that if a man be contrite all exterior confession is superfluous or useless. Nothing, however, provoked the Church so much as his attack on the doctrine of Transubstantiation. It is unnecessary to follow the subtle argumentation with which he assailed this cherished superstition of the Church, or the equal subtlety with which he builds up his own theory of consubstantiation. The chief point to note is that by exposing the blasphemous pretension "to make the body of Christ" he struck a deadly blow at the influence which the priesthood exercised over the ignorant and credulous. Had Wiclif's reforming energies, however, been confined to combating doctrines in lectures and treatises his place in the history of the Reformation would not have been so important as it is. Many of the criticisms which he made had already been formulated by men like Marsiglio and Occam. What distinguishes Wiclif from his predecessors, apart from his political work, is that he took active measures to educate the people in these new conceptions; and that in affording them the means of reading the Bible he placed in their hands

a touch-stone, as it were, by which they could test the validity of the Church's claims and doctrines and also the soundness of his own criticism and views. It is scarcely possible to over-estimate the importance to the whole Reformation movement in England of Wiclif's translation of the Bible and his institution of the "Poor Priests". These itinerant preachers carried his doctrines throughout the greater part of England and gave them a permanent lodgment in the minds of the people. Although it was a laborious and costly business to make copies of his translation, the number that was put in circulation must have been very considerable. Notwithstanding the rigorous measures taken to suppress them some hundred and fifty manuscripts are still extant. Through this process of dissemination it was made impossible for the Church in England to stamp out the new Protestant heresies. Persecution for a time drove them underground, but they were too widely distributed throughout the country and too securely fixed in the minds of the people to be eradicated. This work of education had its political aspect too. Men could scarcely exercise their minds on the subjects which Wiclif was setting before them without being led to consider more closely their rights as citizens, and to claim in regard to civil and political questions the same freedom of thought and speech which they exercised in regard to religious matters.

It/

It was natural that Wiclif's reform work should be almost wholly critical and that in his writings there should be no definite attempt to sketch the scheme of an organised church to supply the hierarchical system he would have swept away. An age of criticism will usually precede an age of reconstruction. In the history of the Church the latter half of the Fourteenth Century was a time for criticism if ever there was one. Scandalous and widespread abuses were crying aloud for redress. It was the great work of Wiclif to bring home to the nation, by criticism and exhortation the need for sweeping reform, and had not political causes intervened much might have been done. His very vehemence however carried him further than his contemporaries were prepared to follow. It is even possible that Wiclif himself, had he been allowed to shape the Church of England in accordance with his ideas, would have modified some of his views when he came to put them into actual operation. The logical outcome of Wiclif's doctrinal theories would have been the sweeping away of all the elaborate ceremonial and prelatical system of the Church. There would have been a reversion to the simple forms, to the life of apostolic poverty and service, of the early followers of Christ. There would have been no endowments/

endowments of any kind, and the homely clergymen of his Church would have been solely dependent on the free-will offerings of their flocks. How far the Christian religion could be organised on these principles, or conserved in the complex society of modern times, is doubtful. . Certainly the attempt was not made during the Reformation movement in England in the 16th Century. In later times, however, and in other lands, some earnest attempts have been made on the lines of Wiclif's theory, but it must be admitted with doubtful success.

In the closing years of his life Wiclif manifested the same high courage, the same unquenchable zeal for truth, the same determination to try all things by the word of Christ. At no part of his career does his greatness of spirit stand so clearly revealed as when, without favour of Court or University, he confronted the whole power of the Church. To the last he held his ground with unswerving fortitude, and almost the closing act of his life was, in answer to a summons to appear at Rome, to restate with simple dignity his conception of the duties of a Pope.

Struck down by paralysis, on the 31st December, 1384 he passed away at his home in Lutterworth.

One event in this later part of Wiclif's life calls for more than a passing allusion. Some attempt has been made to associate his doctrines with the great Peasants' Rising in 1381/

1381. Undoubtedly much in Wiclif's theory of "dominion in grace" and views respecting Church endowments is capable of being travestied into an attack upon property in general. In one way especially he laid himself open to a serious charge of instigating men to lawless actions. He openly declared that tithe and other payments demanded from parishioners were alms which might be withheld when it was clear that they were being supplied, or appropriated by churchmen who were not doing their sacred duties. The "poor priests" who carried his doctrines into the country districts may not always have been able to keep the clear line of his arguments, or to note his qualifications. Agitators of the type of John Ball no doubt gladly seized upon any part of Wiclif's teaching which by twisting could be made to lend support to the revolutionary doctrines they were spreading throughout the country. All this is possible. It is not easy in such circumstances to determine how far a man's influence may reach through channels legitimate and illegitimate. But as a matter of historical fact there is not a shred of direct evidence to inculcate Wiclif in any way with the abortive Rising of 1381. The whole tenor of his later writings is against such harsh and revolutionary methods of seeking redress of grievances. It was rather his object to uphold the power of the king and the temporal/

temporal lords in order "to forge a weapon with which to strike down the Church". It is, however, clear that the revolt of the peasants was seized upon by Wiclif's opponents as a means of throwing discredit on his doctrines; and the revelation of such deep and widespread discontent amongst the lower classes checked any feeling in favour of disendowment. Still it is to be remembered that before the Rising John of Gaunt's attack on the property of the Church was pretty well played out and had ceased to be a question of practical politics. In fact the times were not yet ripe for the sweeping reforms which Wiclif had been advocating. His conception of a Church dealing purely with its own special affairs, having no part whatever in the secular administration, was a notion too far in advance of his age. Not in a generation could a connection so intimate and of such long duration be broken. Even as regards repudiating papal interference the government seemed scarcely prepared to go so far as Wiclif would have liked. The nation, indeed, was not yet strong enough to throw over the Pope. Embarrassed with its wars, weakened by the long-continued drain upon its resources, the country could not face the danger of a crusade which the Pope had it in his power to launch against England. Still there can be no doubt that Wiclif had shaken the authority of the Papacy to its foundation, and had made it impossible for/

for the Pope to exert on England the same influence which he had exerted and continued to exert on the Continent.

It is at all times difficult to estimate the influence of a man's work in the sphere of public affairs. The necessity which the statesman or ecclesiastic is under of allying himself with others and of sharing the fortunes of a party tends to obscure his individual contribution to the ideas and efforts of his time. In the case of Wiclif this initial difficulty is increased by a variety of circumstances. The period of his public activity was one of unusual complexity in the history of the English people. The deeper currents of national life were beginning to change their course and to flow in new directions. A growing sense of nationality was stirring in the hearts of the people. The spirit of the coming Renaissance was already moving uneasily in its sleep. The relations of Church and State had reached a crisis. The mind of the nation was weary of the **burden** and irritated at the ill-success of the war with France. Men were ready to fix the blame on any one. The gaunt spectres of poverty and disease were stalking throughout the land. Blind to all true national needs, the various political factions were busy manoeuvring to maintain or to increase their power in the state. Into this uncongenial sphere Wiclif had been drawn, moved by an earnest/

earnest desire to reform the Church and to ameliorate the social conditions of the people. But so closely at this time were Church and civil affairs bound together, that he could not deal with the one without producing an effect on the other. Of definite political result there is, indeed, not much to be gathered from such imperfect survey as can be taken of Wiclif's public career. His most explicit services to the state were to strengthen the hands of the civil authority in its contest with the Pope, to uphold the supremacy of the Crown in national affairs, and to justify the claim of the state to tax the clergy. But Wiclif's place in history is not to be determined by a consideration of these services in their immediate results only. Reviewing his work from the standpoint of a later age, we can see that he was the first to seriously set his hand to draw asunder Church and State. Not until this severance had been effected was it possible for the nation to attain to political freedom. To Wiclif undoubtedly belongs the credit of having given the first powerful impulse to the movement which ultimately shook free the state from the grasp of the Catholic Church. In a more general way he seems to have exerted a great influence over the people of England. The whole spirit of his writings would help to foster and expand the growing sense of nationality and to develop a sturdy patriotism. The causes which produced/

produced a reaction against Wiclifism have already been glanced at. The Revolt had frightened the nobles away from a policy of disendowment; and Wiclif's own later heresies had startled the better classes into a more orthodox attitude towards the Church. The comparative ease with which Lollardy was suppressed in the first quarter of the 15th Century indicates that the nation was scarcely ready for the changes in Church and State which Wiclif had advocated. The brilliant exploits of Henry V., who it has been aptly said galvanised for a time the dead chivalry of the Middle Ages into something like life, and the bitter, desolating Wars of the Roses combined to divert men's minds from the evils which had engaged the nation during the closing years of Edward III's reign and throughout the reign of his grandson Richard. But Wiclif's work had not been in vain. Throughout the 15th Century his thoughts were germinating in the hearts of the people. His translation of the Bible, despite all efforts to suppress it, was being widely read. When peace once more settled over the land, and the old problem of the relations of Church and State again emerged in the reign of Henry VIII., the country was found prepared to welcome a bold and radical settlement.

Any sketch, however meagre, of Wiclif's place in the history of the Reformation would be incomplete without a glance at the part which his works played in developing the spirit of nationality, and in kindling the torch of religious freedom, in other countries than his own. On the continent, as in England/

England the great problem of the Middle Ages was the relation of Church and State. To a large extent England's isolated position and innate love of independence had saved her from falling completely under the sway of the Papacy. But on the Continent the Pope had been able to play a more successful part and had to a considerable extent established the claim of the Church to be above all merely secular administration. The Great Schism, however, had weakened the power of the Roman Pontiffs in the early part of the 15th Century and slackened their grasp over men's minds. The times were favourable for the reception on the Continent of such doctrines as Wiclif had been promulgating. "There was", says Mr Bryce in reference to this time, "in Europe a certain disposition to look with favour on the secular power - a wish to escape from the unhealthy atmosphere of clerical despotism to the rule of positive law." We know that from about the end of the 14th Century Wiclif's writings had been finding their way abroad, and the vigour of the Church's attack upon them is a good indication of the widespread influence they were exerting. In Bohemia especially was the effect of his teaching manifest. But we cannot here attempt to trace the effect of Wiclifism through the writings and patriotic efforts of Huss, Jerome of Prague, Peter Payne, Ziska and others down to the/

the election of George of Podiebrod. It is sufficient to say that from Wiclif, above all others, were drawn the kindling thoughts which fired the people of Bohemia to claim and successfully assert their right to national independence and political freedom.

V.

We turn now to follow the course of the movement so decisively forwarded by Wiclif. For some time after his death the influence of the great reformer may be traced in the political as well as in the religious life of the nation. His reasoned attack on the papal power continued to be of great service to the state, and indeed to the bishops also, in withstanding the insidious encroachments of the Papacy. In two principal ways the Popes had for long been invading the constitutional rights of the nation: First by exercising a power of patronage over all offices in the Church of England, and second, by claiming a right of jurisdiction in cases in which any of the interests of the clergy were concerned. As far back as the age of Grossetete efforts can be traced to throw off the power of provision and reservation which the Pope exercised./

exercised. In the time of these early efforts the chapters and Bishops were too afraid of the Papacy to offer effective resistance, and later, when the evils attending the practice had aroused Parliament, both bishops and kings connived at it to suit their own convenience. A statute was passed against the practice in Edward I's reign (1307); but it soon became a dead letter and no further legislation was attempted till Edward III's reign. In 1343 an ordinance was passed on the lines of the 1307 Statute declaring Papal Bulls, reservations, etc. illegal, but it received no substantial backing and it was never entered in the Statute Book. A more determined effort was made in 1351 and resulted in the famous Statute of Provisors, and in the following year purchasers of provisions were declared outlaws. The significant fact, however, that in 1365 another Act was called for repeating the prohibitions and penalties shows how unavailing^{were} the efforts of Parliament to put down the evil. Edward III. had no scruples, when it suited his purpose, about playing into the hands of the Pope in the matter of provisions. Pressure from the Parliament, however, forced him to take action in 1374 (Wiclifian influence was no doubt at work by this time), and an embassy was sent to Bruges to remonstrate with the Pope. Although Wiclif himself/

himself was a prominent member of this embassy little was effected and a promise made by the Pope in 1377 to allow freedom of election to the chapters proved equally illusory. Nothing could better illustrate the great hold which the Pope had on the English Church, and the difficulties of restraining his power, than these efforts to do away with provisions and reservations.

The internal conflicts and rivalries of parties in Church and State gave many opportunities to the Popes of making their influence felt. In the eighties however, a marked change is observed in the attitude of England towards the Papacy. The Great Schism broke out in 1378, and the miserable spectacle was presented to Europe of the rival heads of the Church launching crusades against each other and embroiling nations in war. It had a profound effect on Wiclif and henceforward he condemned in the most vehement terms the whole institution of the Papacy. Wiclif's was by this time a potent voice in England and his denunciations, chiming in with the long continued mutterings at the Pope's encroachments, moved the people deeply. Since the revolt and the fall of Lancaster the clergy had been relieved of their apprehensions of an attack on their endowments, and in consequence were in no pressing need of Papal support. Besides a divided Papacy had no such powers as in the days/

days of its unity. Accordingly when in 1390 the Statute of Provisors was re-enacted and confirmed by Parliament (influenced by Wiclifite sentiment) there was more chance of its being adhered to. In 1393 the great Statute of Praemunire, "one of the strongest defensive measures taken during the Middle Ages against Rome", finally secured, after repeated efforts, the jurisdiction of the courts of England from Papal usurpations, and also a strict observance of the Statute of Provisors. So long as the power of the Papacy in England remained in the same weakened state there was no serious attempt made to evade either the Statute of Praemunire or the Statute of Provisors. With a re-united Papacy and revived dissensions in England the practice was ^srepeated for a time; but it never attained serious dimensions and in the reign of Henry VII. and earlier years of Henry VIII. the Popes were too busy elsewhere to give heed to England.

Prior to 1382 the attempts which the Church had made to crush the heresies of Wiclif had been futile, largely because of the position of strength which the great reformer held in the political world. But the effect of the Revolt and of his attack on Transubstantiation had been to isolate Wiclif and to leave him and his followers exposed to the anger of the Church. Archbishop Courtenay was not slow to seize this opportunity of striking at the Lollards. Their heresies were solemnly arraigned and/

and condemned at a Church council in Blackfriars, and appeal was made to Parliament that in the work of persecution the Bishops might have the support of the King's officers and sheriffs. The king and the Lords were ready enough to join in suppressing Lollardy and an ordinance was granted; but it is significant that this was done in the absence of the Commons.

Meanwhile throughout the summer and autumn of 1382 a struggle of the greatest importance for the fortunes of the heretics had been going on at Oxford. The University of Oxford was at this time the great centre of religious education in the kingdom. It trained the priests who taught in all the parishes of England. Had Lollardy captured this centre of religious influence its fortunes would in all probability have been very different. It is the one great mistake of Wiclif's career that he did not realise this and that he gave little or no support to his followers at Oxford who had to face the combined forces of the King, the Bishops and the regular clergy. During the unequal struggle which his wavering supporters Repyngton, Aston, Hereford and Rygge maintained against formidable odds, Wiclif appears to have withdrawn from the turmoil to Lutterworth. There he reverted to the visionary conception of St. Francis of Assisi. The practical effect of his attempt to recall the ideal of apostolic poverty was to make Wiclif indifferent to a/

a trained and learned priesthood, to alienate men of the better classes who would have been prepared to find a career in advocating his views, and to place the Lollard movement more and more in the hands of the poor and the illiterate. With the help of the King, the bishops, in strange alliance with the friars, succeeded in winning Oxford for orthodoxy. The champions of Wiclifism proved themselves miserably weak in the hour of trial; and although for thirty years and more after this traces of Lollard heresy are discernible, the broad fact remains that Oxford was lost to the Reformation movement, and even in the 16th Century it was Cambridge and not the old university of Wiclif that led the way.

It is remarkable that although strongly backed by Richard II. Courtenay made no attempt to strike at Wiclif himself. The reformer was left unmolested at Lutterworth, and there with the help of his friend Purvey carried on his work of translation and of dispatching his "poor priests" throughout the country. We can only conjecture at the reason of this immunity from persecution which Wiclif enjoyed. For one thing the people of England were not familiar with persecutions for heresy, for the good reason that heresy had hitherto been unknown in the land. The position of the clergy was not a strong one and had been further weakened by the division in the Papacy. The Revolt had/

had alarmed the landed interests and the knights of the shire were little disposed to stir the still warm ashes of discontent by a crusade on heretics in the interests of a degenerate Church. Wiclif also had by this time won a great place in the eyes of the nation and had rendered signal service to the state. It is possible that these things explain the slowness of the Church to come to close quarters with Wiclif; perhaps also the fact that he was an old man and his vital force well-nigh spent.

The effect of the capture of Oxford by the orthodox party had been to scatter the Wiclifites over the country: and the result showed itself in the strength of Wiclifism in the nineties. London, Leicester, Bristol and other parts of the West of England became especially associated with their activity. The Lollards indeed had much to commend them. Like the friars of the 13th Century they set out on their mission with the fervour of a new religious ideal in their hearts. They came amongst a people who had ceased to respect the clergy, but who were still ready to welcome religious precept and homily when it was placed simply and earnestly before them. The Lollard denunciations of images, shrines and worship of the saints were driven home by instances of the folly and evil of these things which were notorious among the people. It may be doubted, however, whether the new/

new doctrine of Consubstantiation would appeal to the unlettered mind. All could appreciate, however, the contrast between the energy, enthusiasm and 'sanctity of demeanour' of the Lollard preachers and the greed, profligacy and laziness of the monks and friars. They won considerable favour with the knights of the shire and the ruling classes in the towns, a sure sign that there was no tincture of revolutionary doctrines in their sermons.

Courtenay and the King in their attack seemed above all anxious to destroy the literature of the Wiclifites; against the preachers themselves spiritual punishments only were meted out. Nor was there, indeed, occasion to go beyond the penalty of excommunication; for, as Mr Trevelyan points out, the first generation of Lollards appear not to have had the stuff of martyrs in them. One decisive proof, however, of the hold which Lollardy had at that time in the country is shown by the strength of the party in Parliament. In the October of 1382 the Commons insisted on the withdrawal of the ordinance granted, in response to Courtenay's appeal, in their absence in May; and in Parliament, and also in the Privy Council, Lollardy continued to be for some years a force to be reckoned with. In 1393 the party was strong enough, during an expedition of the King to Ireland, to bring in a petition directed against the various evils in/

in the Church which Wiclif had attacked. The situation was one of considerable anxiety to the bishops, and their weakness to deal with the crisis is shown by the haste with which they dispatched messengers to the King to come to their succour.

Richard was a strenuous supporter of the Church, although it is possible that the influence of his Bohemian wife until her death in 1394 had a restraining effect upon him in the measures which he adopted towards the Wiclifites. He returned immediately to the city, and the parliamentary Lollards showed themselves as weak as the preachers in presence of the King's vigorous measures. Richard, however, was content with crushing the heretics in Parliament. Throughout the country the Lollard preachers were allowed to move amongst the people unmolested for the most part. In this way Lollardy was enabled to take firm root and, as Mr Trevelyan says, "to produce men of sterner stuff" in a new generation.

Courtenay died in 1396 and was succeeded by Thomas of Arundel. The new Archbishop was inclined for harsher measures against the reformers; but the political troubles of the next few years gave the Lollards a breathing time. Arundel himself was involved in difficulties and within measurable distance of falling a victim to the tyrannical folly of Richard. In the next reign, however, combining the offices of Archbishop and Chancellor/

Chancellor, he became the leading spirit of Henry's government, and quickly set to work to deal with the Lollards. Henry IV. had received valuable support from the bishops during the revolution which had finally seated him on the throne. He had pledged himself to advance the interests of the Church and it was besides highly desirable to keep the support of the Church. He accordingly gave Arundel assistance in his attack upon the Lollards. As it happened, the measures taken against the reformers were made the means of pressing subsidies from the religious houses. Every appearance of activity on the part of the Lollards, especially when it took the form of proposals in Parliament for the confiscation of endowments, alarmed the clergy; and although filled with bitter discontent at the repeated calls upon them, they could not afford to lose favour with the king. Henry himself was for years in no easy or secure position. It (neither suited him) to lose the support of the Church nor yet to risk arousing the peasantry and knights by a too vigorous attack upon the Lollards. Accordingly, although stringent acts were passed against the reformers, Henry did not press them with all the vigour he might have, had his position been securer. Where heresy, or for that matter orthodoxy itself (e.g., execution of Scrope), was identified with rebellion, he acted with the utmost promptitude and rigour; otherwise/

wise he moved with caution. As a result he found favour with neither one side nor the other. The famous act De Haeretico Comburendo (1401) was, however, a substantial gain for the Church party. It gave the bishops power to condemn heretics in their own courts and to call in the sheriff to inflict punishment by burning. But the first martyr to the Lollard cause, William Sawtre, perished by a special royal writ a few days before the Act was passed. Under pressure of this new statute recantations were plentiful. It is noticeable that Lollardy amongst the knights was left undisturbed, and the first martyr under the new act was a poor ⁱtaylor of Evesham, John Badby, who was burned at the stake in 1410.

Meantime Lollard influence had been making itself felt in Parliament. In 1404 and in the following year proposals were deliberately made in the Commons to confiscate the temporalities of the Church, and again in 1410 an elaborate estimate of the Church lands was brought forward by the knights, and proposals made to divert a portion to support the Crown, the army and the poor. But it is significant that these proposals are confined to the subject of disendowment. There are indications indeed that by this time the Lollard party had drawn itself into two sections; those who were more concerned with Wiclif's later doctrinal heresies, and those who supported his earlier policy of/

of disendowment. These parties were for the most part drawn from very different ranks of society and it may be doubted whether there were any dealings between them. The former were engaged in promulgating a new religious conception that could only be tested, as Mr Trevelyan says, "in the slow crucible of Time"; the latter were attempting to introduce a new Church policy into the country. The future of Wiclifism was with the poor preachers, and although it suffered degeneration to some extent in their hands they yet conferred upon it the glory of a martyr's cause. Meanwhile the party for disendowment made the greater show of strength in the country. In 1406 a petition was presented to Parliament in which the Lollards are described as threatening the whole social fabric with their communistic schemes and as stirring up the people against the king. This has all the appearance of a mere revival of the old stories against Wiclif and the petition was most likely an attempt on the Church party to incite the King to active measures. It seems, however, to have failed in its purpose and Henry continued his policy of cautious pressure. With the accession of a new king came an important turn in the fortune of the Lollards. Henry V. enjoyed a much firmer position than his father and he was soon to gather the enthusiasm of lords and knights around him by a vigorous renewal of the French War. Arundel pushed for/

for severer treatment of the heretics and this time struck at higher game. The most prominent Lollard in the country was Sir John Oldcastle, a man of military reputation and a personal friend of the King. He was a whole-hearted convert to the doctrines of Wiclif and had used his position and wealth to succour and befriend the Lollard preachers. Convocation made unsuccessful efforts to deal with him, and the King himself endeavoured in vain to reason him out of his beliefs. In 1413 he was arrested and lodged in the Tower. In the presence of his judges he showed an undaunted spirit and gave the freest expression to his heresy. The court was left with no option and sentence of death was passed. But Oldcastle escaped from the Tower and for four years defied all efforts to capture him. The Lollards rallied round their protector. The country was flung into disorder. Succour came to the heretics from the Welsh and the Scots, and for a time the government appeared to be in a position of some danger. In reality, however, the movement had not touched the people as a whole. The country was being dazzled once more by a victorious renewal of the French War. In Agincourt they lived over again the glorious days of Crecy and Poitiers. Still, both Church and State had been alarmed by the socialistic unrest revealed by Oldcastle's rebellion; and a strong measure was passed in 1414 to deal with Lollardy.

This/

This was the famous Statute of Leicester. By this Act heresy was made an offence against the common law as well as against the Canon law. It attacked the Lollards on the ground of being rebels; and the civil power itself was to take the initiative against them. This was the last statute against the Lollards, and under it the ruthless burnings of later times were perpetrated. Oldcastle was captured in 1417 and along with thirty-seven of his followers suffered death.

From this time onwards the Lollards were politically never really dangerous. Parliament had occasionally to deal with them, as in 1422, in 1425 and again in 1431 when John Scharpe started a propaganda for disendowment; but they had now lost caste with the knights and the well-to-do. They were satisfied to gather themselves in obscure conventicles and to encourage one another in Bible reading and in circulating such pamphlets as Wiclif's 'Wicket'. The tragedies of Constance and the rising of the Hussites in Bohemia made the Bishops in England all the more alert to suppress any signs of Wiclifism. From time to time Lollards were burned at the stake and the procession of martyrs may be dimly traced down through the century. But the Lollards formed no organised party. As the movement continued to pass into the hands of poor 'Bible readers' the original doctrines of Wiclif became considerably adulterated. Wiclif's theory that/

that the Bible was the sole standard of authority opened a way for untrained minds indulging in various exegetical vagaries. It became an axiom with them that the Bible was the only true and sufficient guide to all human actions, and that a simple knowledge of reading was all that was required for its interpretation. It was this attitude of the Lollards that suggested to Bishop Peacock in the fifties a way of meeting them by argument, instead of by persecution. He pointed out in his 'Repressor of Over much Blaming of the Clergy' that the Bible did not cover the whole ground of human action. "For how shall we dare to wear breeches which the Bible does not mention; how justify the use of clocks to know the hour." He pushed this flank attack upon the Lollards with great vigour. The revelation of the Bible he argued "was intended to supplement and not to displace reason", and when reason and the scriptures conflict then reason must prevail. It was the importance which he assigned to the reason as an "independent source of truth and morals" which involved him in trouble with the Church. In upholding the supremacy of reason against the Lollards' far-fetched interpretations of Scripture, he apparently did not perceive that he was placing a dangerous weapon in the hands of the opponents of the Church. How could pilgrimages, masses for the dead, 'the sacredness of images and relics', be justified/

fied by Scripture any more than the peculiar tenets of the Lollards? And if reason was to be the only criterion of truth how much of the ecclesiastical system might not be legitimately impugned? The Bishops had no mind to have Lollardy assailed in this fashion, and Peacock was promptly cited for heresy in 1457. He easily recanted, for he was not filled with the ardour of a new religious conception as the Lollards were. Nevertheless he was imprisoned for life and forbidden the use of writing materials. The significance of Peacock's case is two-fold. The Lollards could not have been at all threatening or dangerous, when the Church could punish one of its own bishops for the kind of arguments he used against the heretics; and second, the clergy must have been abnormally sensitive to criticism when they scented heresy in the dialectics of a book directed against their enemies.

During the thirty years of the Wars of the Roses Lollardy and Church affairs generally were eclipsed, although the burning of martyrs at Tower Hill in 1466 and 1474 marks the persistence of the Lollard movement; and it is probable that many records of heresy trials perished in the devastations of the Civil War. At any rate it is a remarkable fact that from the advent of Henry VII. we have an increasing number of recorded trials and executions of Lollards. The Registers of the persecuting Bishops/

Bishops between 1490 and 1521 give evidence of very considerable Lollard activity, especially in the counties of Lincoln, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Middlesex, Buckingham and Somerset. But new forces were at work in England now, and we must turn for a moment to trace these.

VI.

In many ways the 15th Century is one of the deadest periods in the history of the English people. During the almost incessant turmoil of foreign wars and domestic struggles constitutional development came practically to a standstill. "The weapons which are used by the politicians of the 16th and 17th Centuries", says Bishop Stubbs, "are taken with little attempt at improvement or adaptation, from the armoury of the 14th Century." In the religious life of the nation the evils against which Wiclif had inveighed so bitterly assumed even greater dimensions. In close alliance with the Crown and barons the "Church had sunk into a mere section of the landed aristocracy." Monastic life and the conduct of the friars went from bad to worse. "All spiritual life", says Mr Green, "seemed to have been trodden out in the ruin of the Lollards."

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The Wars of the rival Roses were marked by a savagery unexampled in the history of the country. A spirit of lawlessness and of dissoluteness was abroad throughout the land. English literature was at its lowest ebb. And yet the seeds of life and progress were laid in the soil and the unseen process of germination was going on. Before the close of the century to observant eyes the light of a new dawn might have been apparent.

Wiclifism had been at work throughout the long night. Consciously or unconsciously a large section of the English people had been absorbing and assimilating the more important truths which the great reformer had promulgated. Apart from the Lollards themselves, we may fairly assume that many men had been moved, through the dramatic trials and executions of the heretics, to ponder the state of religion in the country and the general doctrines of the Church. But the movement for reform had all along been hampered by the ignorance prevailing amongst the people. Few laymen of the middle and lower classes could read and books were dear and scarce. When Caxton set up his printing press in the Almonry at Westminster he was about to place a new and potent weapon in the hands of the reformers. A brisk demand for Lollard tracts soon sprang up and, as Bishop Stubbs points out, the vast number of the clergy abroad in society must have had some effect in spreading education. But it was chiefly the absence/

sence of books that had hindered education. The circulation of literature, which followed the invention of printing, in conjunction with the great revival of learning dating from the latter half of the 15th Century, resulted in a gradual enlightenment of the body of the nation. A new love of literature showed itself even among the nobles, and many of them began to make valuable collections of books. Remarkable also is the fact that ecclesiastics like Bishop Langton and Archbishop Warham were caught by the new enthusiasm for learning. And the young Prince, soon to ascend the throne as Henry VIII., showed an aspiration after scholarship altogether unusual amongst scions of the Royal house.

In England the revival of learning is chiefly associated with a remarkable group of Oxford scholars whose work has an important bearing on the history of the movement we have been tracing. Just as Jerome and other Bohemian students had carried the teaching of Wiclif to Prague, so English scholars at the end of the 15th Century returned from Florence to Oxford fired with enthusiasm for the classical studies which they had been pursuing in the city of Lorenzo. Amongst these scholars were Grocyn, Linacre, Lilly, and greatest of all John Colet. At Oxford a new movement began with this start given to the study of the Greek language and literature by Grocyn and Linacre. But in England/

England the revival of learning took from the first a more moral and religious tone than it did in Italy; a circumstance largely due to the powerful influence of Colet. From many points of view Colet reminds us of Wiclif. In learning, piety, courage and zeal he is a worthy successor of the early reformer. Like his predecessor, Colet was a fearless preacher, and in his denunciations of the corruptions of the clergy and passionate advocacy of Christ-like living we hear the very accent of Wiclif; and like Wiclif's his attack ranged from the lowest to the highest in the Church. "O Jesu Christ", he exclaimed, "wash for us not our feet only, but also our hands and our head." Again we seem to be listening to Wiclif in his latter days at Lutterworth, when we come on words like these. "Keep to the Bible and the Apostles' creed, letting divines if they like dispute about the rest." Like Wiclif he accomplished a great educative work. His founding of St. Paul's school in London marks an epoch in the history of English education. There are, however, points of contrast scarcely less interesting. Wiclif's for all its narrow scholastic training was a more comprehensive and penetrative intellect. He played a much broader part in the national life than Colet did. With schoolman's tendency to follow an argument to its furthest logical limits, Wiclif developed his train of reasoning till, as we have seen, he would/

would have swept away the whole ecclesiastical system. There is no such radical tendency in Colet, except in his attack on scholasticism. The primary aim of Colet at Oxford was to get men to turn away from the books of the schoolmen and to give themselves to the study of the Scripture. His lectures on St. Paul were a new departure in exegesis. By setting aside the scholastic glosses and thin spun speculations, and by interpreting the Apostle in a plain commonsense way, and with all the assistance of the new learning, he gave a fresh power and interest to the Epistles.

Colet was more fortunate in his disciples than Wiclif. Two men especially helped to give a European importance to the work of the new Oxford movement. These were Thomas More and Erasmus. In the minds of these men zeal for a purer religion was accompanied by a broader and more philosophic outlook than in Colet's. The great position which More had reached in the state and world of politics and the fame of his Utopia lifted the movement with which his name had become associated into greater prominence. In his Utopia he elaborated the modern principle that governments exist for the good of the whole people; and he places religion and the church in their proper relations to the other constituents of a healthy national life. The whole trend of More's writing is to relate religion to the new/

new intellectual forces at work, and to break its connection with a lifeless scholastic tradition. Erasmus is an even more notable figure in the new movement. Like More he had been deeply influenced by Colet, and owed especially to the great Dean his hatred of the scholastic system and more important still the prompting which made him undertake his great translation of the New Testament. In course of time his reputation as a scholar overspread Europe. His fresh text and translation of the New Testament had a phenomenal sale and quickened immensely that first hand study of the Scriptures which was the most distinctive feature of the Oxford movement. In Erasmus protracted study under great difficulty and unquenchable zeal for religious truth did not dull the lively wit with which nature had endowed him. His "Praise of Folly" set all Europe laughing at the absurdities of the scholastic theologians and monks, and even flicked the Popes with its biting satire. It was a new method of furthering religious reform; but it was thoroughly in keeping with the spirit of the men of the Renaissance.

The movement which the Oxford reformers had initiated and developed was, it must not be forgotten, not in any sense an attack on the system and doctrine of the Church; it was like Grossetete's a cry for^o regeneration in the practice of the clergy, and the propounding of new methods of religious study. Its importance/

portance in connection with the more radical reform movement which we have been tracing in England is, that ~~he~~^{it} touched the very classes which had ever since the fall of Oldcastle drawn themselves aloof from Wiclifism. As we have seen Lollardy gradually passed into the hands of the lower classes; while the knights and lords wrapped closer about them the cloak of orthodoxy. The new learning and the Oxford movement, without instilling actual heresy, undoubtedly slackened the hold of the Roman Church upon the minds of many of the upper classes. The spirit of inquiry and speculation was introduced; men were less disposed to take things on authority. All this was favourable to the reception of the new doctrines which were about to come from Germany, and helps to explain the acquiescence and even co-operation of the people in the revolution which Henry VIII. initiated.

Meanwhile in the early years of the 16th Century there appears to have been a remarkable quickening of the Lollard movement itself. "In London", says Mr Trevelyan, "between 1500 and 1518 men were forced to recant by the score, while four or five were burnt." A similar activity was manifest in other parts of the country. There are indeed sufficient signs at this time to warrant a belief that the Reformation movement, which had been so long on the way in England, would have/

have soon advanced to its completion without the assistance of Luther. Nevertheless the help from Germany was welcome. To the poor and despised Lollards of England it was a memorable day when they were first stirred by the news that the doctrines they had so long espoused were breaking the peace of Europe. In 1517 on the day before the festival of All Saints, Martin Luther nailed his memorable theses to the door of the Palace Church of Wittenberg, and the drama of the German Reformation commenced. But it was not until four years later that Lutheranism began to give "new arms to the great band of Wycliffite heretics".

Our study has brought us within sight of the great cataclysm which was to break the power of the Romish Church and to inaugurate a new era in religious history. We have endeavoured, so far as England was concerned in it, to trace from a distant past, the concurrence of the forces which produced this momentous break with eccl^esiastical tradition and an old-world religious system. In England the final act was strangely mingled with political and even personal intrigue. It remains one of the strangest ironies of history that the great movement for civil and religious liberty, which covered so wide a tract of time and enlisted so many strenuous and earnest men, should in the end/

end achieve success, entangled and tainted by a divorce case. The relations of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn form ~~no~~ no essential part of the history of the Reformation: they merely constitute an unpleasant episode flung by the sport of chance upon the surface of the movement. Had there been no Henry and no Anne the Reformation would yet have come, either when it did, or at no great distance of time after. As Mr Gardiner says, "causes beyond the control of any human being were propelling the nation forward."

From the slight sketch we have given of the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, and the nature and extent of its power, it is manifest that had it been allowed to attain and hold the unchallenged dominion which ^{it} aspired to, there could scarcely have been any sturdy growth of nationalism throughout Europe. To England it was given to play a pre-eminent part in averting this danger. In its many different forms, the struggle engaged men of every class and order of the community, and throughout the cause both of civil and religious liberty was involved. Under the pressure of this long conflict, the English constitution slowly shaped itself; sometimes thwarted in its development by the hold of the Church, sometimes stimulated to growth by the reforming influences. On the general body of the English nation the effects of the long struggle for religious reform/

form can scarcely be exaggerated. Many years, however, had to elapse before the fruits were gathered in the blessings of free and untrammelled political institutions. At a first glance it might seem that constitutionally, the most important results of the downfall of the Romish Church in England was the greatly extended and increased power of the King. And undoubtedly, this was the immediate effect. But reviewing the development of the country in the light of succeeding centuries, we see that it is to the Reformation we owe the extension of the active principle of constitutional progress to the lower ranges of society. The change in the national life, which followed the slackening and removal of the "dead hand" of Romanism, proved to be not, as civic rulers had anticipated, one merely of altered ceremonial and transferred ecclesiastical supremacy. The sense of a personal right to adjust one's own religious belief was the natural sequence of the escape from the bondage of the Church of Rome; and the assertion of the right to determine so all-important a question as religious belief could not be made, without leading men to exercise their judgment over all matters, secular as well as ecclesiastical, affecting the daily life of the nation. So long as the minds of the people were dominated by the influence of the priesthood the "new learning" fell upon ears that dared not listen. For it must be remembered/
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ed that, despite the heroic example of men who ventured to confront existing authority in the cause of religious and intellectual freedom, the bulk of the nation were too sunk in ignorance to fling off the yoke of the Church. The great prestige of the Papacy had to be broken down, and the inquisitorial and punitive powers of the priesthood removed, before the ordinary laity could be led to give heed to the light that was spreading in the land. The improved moral condition of the clergy, which followed the destruction of the monasteries, and the abolition of the Church Courts, reacted with salutary effect upon the people at large. With minds relieved from the burden of grievances that had dulled their energies, men turned with fresh vigour to develop the resources of their country and to claim a wider share in its government.

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