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## THE STORY OF THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

(*The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages.* By the late Hastings Rashdall. A new edition in three volumes, edited by F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden. £3 3s. Oxford, 1936.)

A REVIEW BY THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP E. A. KNOX, D.D.

### I. RASHDALL REVIEWED.

AMONG gossipy legends current in Oxford Common Rooms in the 'seventies was one of a dispute in the Common Room of University College, when (so it was said) one of the Fellows maintained the fabulous foundation of the College by Alfred the Great. Professor Freeman, who was present, took up the cudgels, and bludgeoned the head of the rash maintainer of the College's antiquity with the formidable argument that he could prove to a certainty that Alfred the Great never owned an acre of land in or near Oxford. "Has it not occurred to you, Professor," was the reply, "that the great King is much more likely to have given away the land of other people than his own?" The story is characteristic of an age in which few members of either University were seriously interested even in the history of their own Colleges, to say nothing of University History. College histories were still unwritten. Guide-books, not far in advance of the days of Verdant Green, did service to reply to inquisitive sisters or aunts, who wanted to know how old the College was, and how it came by this building or that. Muniment rooms, very storehouses of medieval life, were still unexplored, or visited only by a few Dryasdusts.

It was by a strange irony of fate that the Tractarians branded as heretical Dr. Hampden, the one man among their contemporaries who had made some study of medieval philosophy. It is true that they based their system on the belief that it was to be found in the Fathers of the second and third centuries. "Men, not more remote in time from the Apostles than I am from my own grandfather taught the doctrines which I teach." So said Dr. Pusey to the writer of this article. Had the Tractarians studied theology in medieval Oxford they would have known that the Fathers were not all of one mind. They would have spent two years upon Peter the Lombard's *Harmony of the Discordant Opinions of the Fathers*. Not till they had mastered it would they have been permitted to read lectures upon the Bible. When the learned Evangelicals, Dr. Goode and Dr. Harrison, pointed out the errors of the Tractarians, they simply refused, with the exception of Dr. Ward, to read the confutation of their cardinal supposition that the Fathers all thought alike. It would have seemed to them incredible that Cranmer or Ridley should have known more about the Fathers than Newman or Pusey. But they did.

Now Dr. Rashdall was a student of philosophy, and was not content, as most Oxford teachers of his time were, to jump from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes, Spinoza, and Hume. He refused to leave the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages in the literary grave to which the Humanists of the seventeenth century had consigned them. He made it his business to trace the stream of philosophic thought through the "Dark Ages," and to know something of that forgotten world in which men, who had lost the knowledge of Greek, still contrived to study Aristotle through translations, and to relate him to the Scriptures and the Fathers. So he found himself at home in the Medieval Universities. He became especially at home in Paris and in Oxford. But thence he passed to the Italian Universities, to Bologna and Salerno, and on to the Universities of Spain, Germany, and Scotland. Anticipated slightly by Father Denifle's work on the *Origins of the Medieval Universities*, he was to all intents and purposes a pioneer in England. Though Bass Mullinger had written an excellent *History of the University of Cambridge*, it needs but a comparison of his book with Dr. Rashdall's to see how much the latter gained by not confining himself to a single University. For student life in the Middle Ages was not national, but cosmopolitan. It is true that provision was made for national groups within a University, and that we read of "Nations" at Paris, Oxford, Prague, Bologna, and several other Universities, though not in the German Universities. After all this was a most natural arrangement. When all the Lancashire towns took their holiday at Blackpool in the same week, it was common to see the lodging-house keepers describe themselves as "Mrs. A. of Bolton," "Mrs. B. of Burnley," "Mrs. C. of Blackburn," and so forth. Fellow-townfolk flocked together. So they did in old days at Paris and Oxford. But for all that the Universities, especially in their earlier days, were not founded by nations, nor governed by nations. They had a common language, Latin, and spoke it fluently. They had common teachers. The *jus ubique docendi* was a highly coveted privilege. In their institutions, their studies, their relations with Church and State, and with the town in which they grew up, they had not only resemblances, but deliberately adopted common principles and practices. It was impossible to isolate their histories in the Middle Ages if any study of them was to be fruitful.

So Dr. Rashdall's book was epoch-making, at all events in England. But with a theme so vast finality was out of the question. Many other disadvantages had to be encountered. Though the Universities had so much in common, each had also its individual life, its origin, the story of its growth, the method of its government, often also the study to which it gave precedence. Hence came frequent repetitions in Rashdall's volumes; hence also dangers of hasty generalisations. The ten years which Dr. Rashdall devoted to the production of his book were all too short for his purpose. In the forty years since it appeared, diligent explorations in the muniment rooms of Universities and Colleges have brought to light stores of material which were not in Dr. Rashdall's reach. It is,

however, a real tribute to the greatness of his work that two such eminent students as Dr. Powicke and Mr. Emden have found in a fresh edition of Dr. Rashdall's book a convenient means of embodying some of the results of their studies. This does not mean that they are satisfied with all Dr. Rashdall's conclusions—far from it. But they recognise that his book gave the impetus to a more fruitful study of medieval life and thought, and that it has real value for the study of medieval thought now actively pursued by historians.

The natural effect of these researches has been to give a new outlook on what were called the Dark Ages.

"The result," says the Introduction, "of these labours is that the intense intellectual life of the Middle Ages is no longer presented as a long and weary orgy of barren chatter, interrupted by the orderly argument of a few men of genius, who are as isolated in history as they are great, but as a process of incessant wisdom and folly with distinguishable lines of development in it, a process which did not come to a sudden close on the appearance of Erasmus and Luther, nor linger fruitlessly in obsolete schools, but threw up ideas and ways of thought and speech which have profoundly influenced the science and philosophy of the modern world."

Rashdall was not unconscious of the influence of medieval philosophy on modern thought. His whole book is evidence to the contrary. But his rigid adoption of the year 1500 as the limit of his researches not only exposed him to the suspicion of yielding "to the artificial barrier which was set for so long by men's minds between the centuries," but it also deprived him of the opportunity of tracing the processes which both linked the old world with the new, and also set them in violent contrast with each other. On the whole, however, it is probable that the general reader will share our surprise that the corrections and additions in the new edition are not more serious and numerous than they are. It is a tribute to Rashdall's genius and industry that his work has stood so well the searching tests applied by modern exploration of archives.

To most readers of this Magazine no small part of the interest of Dr. Rashdall's work will lie in the evidence which it furnishes of the enormous strength of the fabric, spiritual and intellectual, against which the battle of the Reformation was fought. We are so accustomed to think of the corruptions of the Papacy, of the decay of monasticism, of the obscurantism exposed by Erasmus and Ulrich von Hutten, and of the cruel bondage imposed by ecclesiastical courts, to say nothing of a multitude of other sins, crimes, and infirmities of the Church of the Middle Ages, that the victory of the Reformers appears to be a foregone conclusion. It seems as though the walls of a world so debased must inevitably have fallen at the first blast of the trumpet of Luther, Calvin, and Knox. What surprises us is not that the victory was won, but that it was not won more universally and permanently. Readers of Macaulay's *Essay on Ranke's History of the Popes* will not have forgotten his characteristic denunciation of the failure of the Reformers. There is, however, another point of view, which is suggested by perusal of Rashdall's book, and still more by the researches of modern

historians into medieval life and thought. Behind the corruptions with which historians of the Reformation have made us familiar, there was a world of piety and learning built up by the studies and prayers of countless generations, a world to which belonged S. Anselm, S. Bernard, S. Francis, Dante, and in later ages such men as Sir Thomas More, Bishop Fisher, and the monks of the Charterhouse. However seriously we differ from the faith which they held and the doctrines which they taught, we cannot doubt that they believed themselves to be representatives of a Church which had saved Europe from barbarism, enriched it with thought and marvellous works of art and architecture, in fact representatives of a civilisation and devotion threatened with destruction by ill-taught fanatics and rebels. Was it any wonder that they loved the old order, and stood by it? And considering what forces were enlisted on its side is not the marvel rather that the Reformation gained a footing in Europe at all, rather than that its success was not more universal?

## II. THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE REFORMATION.

Amid such reflections as these the following remarks of Dr. Rashdall will be of peculiar interest:

“The Teutonic nation was the last of the nations of Europe to attain to moral and intellectual maturity: it was the last to assert its manhood by a rebellion against Roman usurpation, but it was the first to carry its revolt to a successful issue. The Reformation which succeeded, like the earlier Reform movement of the Middle Ages which had failed, was born in a University. There only were the culture and the learning, the leisure and the possibilities of co-operation, which were necessary for the growth of intellectual and religious revolt, found in union with that measure of liberty which was essential for an even temporary resistance to authority. The mass of the higher clergy was incapacitated for the work of reform, not so much because they were ecclesiastics as because they were primarily politicians and lawyers: the lower clergy were incapacitated by their ignorance and their obscurity; the monks by their wealth and their essential conservatism. An individual friar might indeed be a reformer, but the religious orders were opposed on principle to individual liberty, and were decidedly ultramontane in their tradition, except when they were carried away by visionary and unpractical enthusiasm like those of the spiritual Franciscans and the Fraticelli. It is hardly too much to say that the existence of Universities—Universities of the Northern type with secular faculties of theology—made the Reformation a possibility” (II, 2323).

The foregoing is only one of several allusions in Dr. Rashdall's book to the contribution of the Medieval Universities to the Reformation. In reality, however, his whole work stimulates reflection on the contrast in currents of thought which made, some for the old order, and some for the new. Some of these contending influences, as they are suggested to us by perusal of Dr. Rashdall's book, may be usefully traced in this article, leaving it to our readers to think out for themselves others yet more important, which lie beyond the confines of this study.

## III. CANON LAW.

A powerful factor, the study of Canon Law in the Universities, Dr. Rashdall stigmatises "one of the worst corruptions of the Middle Ages, since it transformed the sacerdotal hierarchy into a hierarchy of lawyers" (I, 140). Now the Canon Law was the law which was administered in the Courts of the Church. It consisted of Decrees of Church Councils and of Popes, and had at one time, in the days of barbarian inroads, been the law by which the clergy claimed to be governed, in contrast to the rude and harsh laws of their conquerors. It was a compound of Roman law, and Church law based on the Old and New Testaments. At the beginning of the eleventh century when Europe was settling down, and recovering from the inroads of barbarian hordes, collections began to be formed of the Canons or rules on which Church law rested. By far the most important of these was the *Decretum* of Gratian, published early in the twelfth century. It did not claim to be more than a textbook, a collection and harmonising of discordant decrees. It would not, however, be easy to exaggerate the importance of a textbook in the Middle Ages, when the written word was the last word in a dispute. But in fact "the *decretum* was the basis of a vast superstruction."

"By it the decrees of the Roman pontiffs were practically placed on a level in point of authority with the Canons of General Councils. Individual doctors might differ from the views of Gratian, particular States or even particular Churches might refuse to accord to the decrees of the Roman Pontiff the reception which was given them in the courts of Rome or the schools of Bologna, but nevertheless the eventual triumph of the *Decretum* is a monument of victory, at least within the bosom of the Church, of the ideas for which Hildebrand contended against the Emperor Henry IV, and St. Thomas against our Henry II" (I, 129).

Important as the publication of the *Decretum* was in itself, it was even more important for the desire which it inspired in the minds of Canonists to elaborate a code of Church Law as complete and consistent as the code of Justinian, and to find for the Church and code a supreme authority as great and awe-inspiring as that of the Emperor on whose authority the Civil Law rested. That supreme and unquestionable authority they found in the Pope. Nor were the Popes slow to take advantage of the method of imposing their will on Christendom, which the *Decretum* suggested. In 1234 Gregory IX put out five books of Decretals to be studied in the schools of Paris and Bologna. In 1298 followed the *Liber Sixtus* of Boniface VIII. The *Clementines* of Clement V were added by John XXII in 1317, and were followed by the *Extravagantes* of Sixtus IV.

Now it has sometimes been contended that no part of the Canon Law was in force in England unless it had been expressly adopted in the Convocations. This view, in spite of high authority claimed for it, is erroneous. What is true is that the English Court of Law claimed as belonging to their authority first one, and then another of the matters for which provision was made in Canon Law. They

clipped the wings of the Canonists by drawing cases into the King's Courts. But they never denied that for ecclesiastical causes the Canon Law sufficed, nor drew any distinction between Decrees accepted or not accepted in England.

Thus there grew up in the Universities, and assuredly in Oxford and Cambridge, a study which came to be recognised as a training for public business and an avenue for preferments. All the Archbishops and Bishops who held civil office under the Crown, or were recognised as its advisers, were Canonists. Again, their secretaries were Canonists. A highly important brand of the clergy came into being, whose whole interests were bound up in the maintenance of Papal authority. They were men of vested interests of no common order. Their status had been laboriously and expensively acquired. For, after three years spent in an Arts Course, they had spent eight years on the study of Civil (i.e. of Roman) Law, and three years more in study of the *Decretum*. For two years, probably concurrently with the above, they must have heard lectures on the Bible, and must have themselves lectured on the Bible, and on a book of the Decretals. Some of our readers may remember how keenly Stephen Gardiner contested passages of Scripture, as well with Cranmer as with other Reformers, whom it fell to his lot to examine. Canonists were probably the pick of graduates for general ability and training, and, next to theologians, they were, so late as the latter part of the fifteenth century, the most numerous of the students at Cambridge (*Grace Book A*, Vol. 2, p. xxix.). No class of men had more cause to oppose the Reformation, or to uphold the Papacy. "The Canonist," says Dr. Rashdall, "was by his profession a champion of the power which had created his class. No Canonist (with the doubtful exception of Cranmer), ever headed a Reform party or inaugurated a religious movement" (I, 262).

It fell outside Dr. Rashdall's self-imposed limitation of the date with which his book was to be concluded, to carry the story of Canon Law to its end. It is obvious, however, that the abolition of Papal jurisdiction in the reign of Henry VIII was bound to be fatal to the study of Canon Law. After 1535, by the Injunctions of Henry VIII, it disappeared from the University curriculum, and with that disappearance vanished also the ancient *hierarchy* of lawyers. A few survive in the shape of Diocesan Chancellors, but the hierarchy is gone. Canon Law has never been abolished altogether in England. Where it is not repugnant to the laws of the Realm, it still holds good in ecclesiastical courts. But it lives a moribund life, the life of an archaic survival. Recent discussions on the relation between Church and State have restored some faint interest in it in the minds of some clergy and ecclesiastically minded laity. But Ichabod. The body cannot live without the head, and the Pope is unquestionably the Head to whose decision cases of Canon Law must be ultimately referred. It was the law of an *imperium in imperio*, of a sacerdotal hierarchy which claimed by Divine authority to rule the consciences of the laity, to prescribe laws for them as well as for the clergy, to enforce those laws by the dire penalties

of excommunication and interdict, to grant remissions and indulgences, and to follow even the departed with pains and penalties in another world. We are so unfamiliar with the idea of Law which punishes *sins* as well as crimes, that we can hardly, even in imagination, picture ourselves living in a world where neglect of religious duties, unhallowed thoughts and desires, even religious doubts and questionings could bring us in as offenders before constituted courts armed with a full system of pains and penalties. Yet such was the medieval world, with this mitigation, that wealth could purchase remission of sentences incurred. But the overthrow of such a system might well seem impossible to those who had lived under it, they, their forefathers and ancestors for many generations. The destruction of such a system would in that case appear to be handing the world over from the rule of Christ to the rule of Satan. In fact the Courts of Bishops and Archdeacons did, even after the Reformation, continue to exercise discipline, and up to a quite recent date the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge yearly pronounced a solemn absolution for certain academical offences. But the rule of the Vice-Gerent of Christ on earth, with all that this awe-inspiring title implies, came to an end in England when Henry VIII compelled his subjects to recognise *him* as Head of the Church of England. History does not really record any greater revolution, in spite of the apparent ease with which it was effected. For his subjects Henry VIII supplanted the Pope; and the *Decretum*, *Clementines*, and *Extravagantes*, with all the Papal Bulls, disappeared from the Schools of Oxford and Cambridge.

#### IV. SACRED THEOLOGY.

More exalted in dignity and importance than even the School of Canon Law was the School of Sacred Theology. A technical description of the theological course is given in the Introduction to *Grace Book A* of the Luard Memorial Series of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, in the following words :

“ The course in theology according to an old Statute . . . requires ten years' study of Theology. . . . The first four or six years will no doubt be filled up by attendance at lectures on the Bible, at lectures on the ' Sentences ' of Peter the Lombard, and at public disputations. In the fifth or seventh year of study theological candidates are admitted to oppose.” (They may take part in the disputations as well as listen to them.) “ This act was a serious one. It extended over the chief part of an academical year . . . and might involve taking part in not less than sixteen disputations. Candidates were bound also to act as respondent to their own master only, and *pro forma* at any rate to all the masters Regent in the Faculty ” (i.e. to all who have been admitted to the D.D. degree within the last two years). These forms fulfilled, ' the deposition ' (in favour of the candidate) “ of one master is required as to his knowledge, and of all the others as to his character.” The candidate is then considered to be a duly qualified bachelor in theology, and is admitted to ' enter the Sentences ' (i.e. of Peter the Lombard). The next two years are given to the  *cursory*  reading of the Sentences, and other theological studies. The candidate then ' enters ' the Bible, i.e. begins a course of lectures on some book of the Old or New Testament. He has also to preach a sermon at S. Paul's Cross (in London). The sentences concluded,



after a fresh course of oppositions, responsions, and replications, he has to preach one sermon at least, a test sermon in Latin, to the clergy in S. Mary's Church. Finally, three years after the completion of the Sentences, by the usual deposition of doctors in the faculty, and on taking the usual oaths to obey the Statutes and to proceed to his inception in due course, he is admitted to 'incept' by the licence of the Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor. After inception he becomes Doctor or Master Regent in Theology. For two years he is bound to continue his Regency and then his arduous course is done" (*Grace Book A*, xxvii).

It must be remembered that we have been reading the description of the Cambridge course—but it is sufficient for our purpose. It is a fair specimen of the course required for the coveted degree of Doctor of Divinity at other Universities.

#### V. THE COST OF A DEGREE.

This description of the D.D. Course cannot but enhance our sense of the sacrifices entailed by pursuit of it. We may picture to ourselves the son of a country gentleman or prosperous yeoman, forsaking his country pursuits or his farm, because he has somehow, from a chantry-priest, or otherwise, been bitten with a thirst for learning. He joins the company of lads whom a traveller is picking up in villages and towns on his road, and undertakes with them the extraordinary discomforts of several days' journey and the risks of highway robbery. Arrived at his University he places himself in charge of the Keeper of a hall for students, is received formally into the care of the University, and begins his course of studies in the Arts. Books he has none, or one or two very costly manuscripts—among them perhaps a Latin Bible. A common room, shared by half a dozen or more boys of about fifteen, is lit by one lamp. The windows are not glazed but shuttered. The floor is bare or strewn with straw. The ceilings are unplastered. Meals are meagre. There is no fire. To get to sleep he has to take a run before he goes to bed. The streets are narrow and reek with accumulations of filth so foul that pestilence is quite a common visitor. Work begins at 7 or 8 a.m. in the School with lectures or disputations, and our student must listen with intentness if he is to give a good account of himself next day. Perhaps, as a beginner, he attends the "cursory" or less formal lectures delivered by Bachelors of Arts. When lectures are over, we expect to hear of recreations, and we do, in the shape of abundant prohibition against all sorts of amusements, not only against such expensive pursuits as hunting and hawking, but against games with balls, marbles, cards, and even chess.

"The ideal student of the Middle Ages probably amused himself little or not at all. The only relaxation which the University system provided for was the frequent interruption of the regular routine for the whole or part of a day in honour of the greater holidays of the Church, or of the festivals of a particular nation or province, or faculty. For the faculty of Arts the great days were the feasts of S. Scholastica and S. Nicholas. Some Statutes contain severe prohibition of carnival licence, but in Scotland two or three

days' holiday was expressly allowed for cock-fighting at this season. In all medieval Universities—but especially at Paris—the student enjoyed an abundance of what may be called ecclesiastical dissipation. For the masters at Paris there were national Vespers and national Mass once a week as well as on many festivals. These functions were followed by a distribution of money or a dinner at the expense of the Nation. For masters and scholars alike there were frequent processions, University Masses, and University Sermons, which at least afforded a welcome relief from morning lecture. The afternoons of holidays supplied the chief opportunity for country walks" (Rashdall. III, 423).

It is not surprising that animal spirits held in check by so many prohibitions reacted from restraint in the shape of furious faction fights, whether of Town and Gown, or of Nations against one another. "Fighting was perpetually going on in the streets of Oxford. . . . There is probably not a single yard of ground in the classic High Street that lies between S. Martin's and S. Mary's which has not at one time or other been stained with blood. There are historic battlefields on which less blood has been spilt" (III, 96). The description of "The Slaughter," the great disturbance of 1355 which follows the foregoing quotation in Dr. Rashdall's book, shows that the medieval student went often in peril of his life, and that Oxford was no home for pacifists then. Even allowing for the general prevalence of hard conditions in the Middle Ages, the student's life was a hard life, a very campaign—to use the terminology of those days. The theologian could not, as a rule, hope for the higher prizes of ecclesiastical life. These went to the Canonist. A Prebend or Benefice was as much as the D.D. could expect.

## VI. THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

A position won at such cost and with so much difficulty could not easily be surrendered. Still less does it appear assailable when we remember the awful sanctity that "hedges" a Priest. He was one of an Order before whom Emperors and Kings might tremble. The penances of Frederick II and Henry II formed the subject of many an illumination in MSS., and were doubtless the theme of many a sermon. From the argument in the Lollard Tract *Wyclif's Wicket*, it appears, as well as from many other sources, that the Priest in the Mass was popularly believed to "make God." Of that holy Sacrifice the layman was rarely a participant, never more than a participant in one kind, and never actually a participant with the Priest of the same loaf. For the laity the "housel" bread sufficed, but the celebrant alone consumed "the singing bread," the very Christ created by the act of his consecration. In the Name of God, and of coercing power bestowed by God, he had the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, the power of admitting to that Kingdom by baptism, and thenceforward the power of maintaining or shutting off all intercourse with God. It is practically impossible for us to recapture, even in imagination, the world to which these powers were solemn realities. But the world existed. Those were the days of the Strong Man Armed. Who was the stronger than he?

## VII. THE STRONGER THAN HE.

In the Providence of God "the stronger than he" was raised up in the very heart of medieval scholasticism, in the University, so often called the "Home of lost Causes." Strongly as it has been maintained, especially by J. Gairdner in his *Lollardry and the Reformation*, that Wyclif's work and influence finished with him or soon after his day, there is abundant proof that Milton was right in hailing Wyclif as the true herald of the Reformation, and that Milton's words in the *Arcopagitica* are rather extravagant than untrue.

"Why else was this nation chosen before any other, that out of her, as out of Sion, should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of the Reformation of all Europe? And had it not been for the obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the *admirable* and *divine* spirit of Wyclif to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemians Hus and Jerome, no, nor the names of Luther and Calvin had ever been known, the glory of reforming all our neighbours had been completely ours. But now, as our obdurate clergy have with violence demeaned the matter, we are become hitherto the latest and backwardest scholar of whom God offered to make us the teachers."

Naturally Milton writes as a Congregationalist, who regards even the Church of England as imperfectly reformed. Nor had Milton access to many of Wyclif's works, which were for centuries later still unknown in England. But, though Milton writes as a partisan rather than as a historian, he hit upon the truth when he described Wyclif as "*the trumpet of the Reformation*," the pioneer who achieved a work that could never be undone. It is in the light of the history of the Universities of Europe that this proposition can be firmly established.

Certain outstanding facts help us to fix the true place of Wyclif, especially in connection with medieval thought. The following extract from Dr. Rashdall's work should be noted by all students of Reformation history:

"It is a striking illustration of the success which attends well-conducted persecution that Wyclif had been almost ignored by the historians of philosophy. His great works remained in manuscript up to the quincentenary of his death. This is not the place in which to assign to Wyclif his proper place in the history of scholastic philosophy. But, although it is probable that he was not one of the greatest or most original intellects of the Middle Age, the intellectual movement of which Wyclif and Wyclifism were the outcome does represent the culmination of that speculative fermentation of which fourteenth-century Oxford was the centre. The movement represents the last great effort of expiring scholasticism: its fate may be considered to have shown that scholasticism could not effect either the intellectual or the religious emancipation at which Wyclif aimed. The first of the Reformers was the last of the Schoolmen, at least in England. The ecclesiastical repression which followed the collapse of the Wyclif heresy meant the extinction of all vigorous and earnest scholastic thought. Archbishop Arundel's triumph over the University in 1411 sounded the death-knell of Oxford Scholasticism. The great realist and nominalist debate lingered on for a century more; but all the life had been taken out of it; all real, fresh intellectual activity was being diverted into other channels" (III, 269 ff.).

## VIII. THE STRENGTH OF LOLLARDRY.

Now here is a solid fact which should arrest attention. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Oxford attained European fame as a centre of scholasticism. Its intellectual activity far surpassed that of Paris. Its great doctors, sons of Oxford, though they afterwards taught elsewhere, included Richard Middleton, John Dumbleton, Walter Burleigh, John Bunthorp, Roger Swinsheed, William Heytesbury, Ralph Strode, Richard Billingham, John Chillmark, and above all William of Occam, who had studied and graduated at Oxford before he taught in Paris. "Not all the other nations and Universities of Europe," says Dr. Rashdall (III, 267), "could between them muster such a list." Yet by the fifteenth century all this glory, all the fertility in producing great doctors, had passed away. Even though the Editors of Dr. Rashdall's book think that he attributes too much force to Arundel's Constitutions, holding that they were not strictly enforced, it is unquestionable that the connection between Wyclif's work at Oxford, and the decay of the scholastic philosophy, which had been the glory of Oxford, was very real. Wyclif, in fact, made his University once more "the home of lost causes." But Wyclif did not wound scholasticism thus deeply without pointing the way to a new study of the Bible, in which Oxford might have led the way but for the Lollard persecutions.<sup>1</sup>

Mention of the Bible brings us at once to the greatest of all Wyclif's achievements—his securing a translation of the Bible, and its circulation among those who would never hope to attain a knowledge of it through a University education, or to devote ten years to the study of theology. The more we study this achievement, the more wonderful is it found. Starting with the ordinary layman we find him shut out from knowledge of the Bible by his ignorance of Latin. Scraps of it he might hear in sermons, but sermons were comparatively infrequent. When we pass from the layman to the secular clergy, these fall into two classes, the graduates and those who were ordained without a University course—these latter amazingly ignorant even of the meaning of the services which they performed. Of the graduates

"the poorer," writes Dr. Rashdall, "must usually have left the University with a degree in Arts or no degree at all, and consequently without the rudiments of a theological education. Theological knowledge the artist had none, except what perchance he may have picked up at a university sermon. It is a mistake indeed to suppose that the medieval Church, at least in England, up to the re-action against Wyclifism, was actively opposed to Bible reading even on the part of the laity: still less would it have any disposition to interfere with it in clerks at the University. But a student in Arts would have been as likely to read the Bible as he would to dip into Justinian or Hippo-

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<sup>1</sup> Rashdall's estimate of Wyclif as a Schoolman is open to challenge, as reference to H. B. Workman's *John Wyclif* will show (vol. i, p. 4). He is there described on the authority of his contemporary Knighton as "the most eminent doctor of the theology of his time, in philosophy second to none, in the training of the schools without a rival."

crates.<sup>1</sup> Much astonishment has sometimes been expressed at Luther's 'discovery' of the convent Bible at Erfurt. The real explanation of his previous ignorance of its contents is that Luther entered the Order a master of arts who had never studied in a theological faculty. Even the highly educated secular priest, who was not a theologian, or at best a canonist, was not supposed to know anything of the Bible but what was contained in his missal or his breviary" (III, 450).

It may indeed be questioned whether Dr. Rashdall has not in the above extract somewhat overstated the lack of Bibles—i.e. of Latin Bibles—in University life. For we have a list of books deposited as pledges by students as security for loans from the Proctor's chests. Between the years 1454 and 1488 we have forty-eight Bibles so deposited. The number is not large, but it is greatly in excess of any other book so deposited. Nor is it perhaps quite without significance that in 1500 the Bibles deposited are seventy-four, keeping pace with the growth of students at Cambridge, the University from whose records these facts are taken. The number of Bibles in both cases is small, but books were still rare, and apparently Bibles were more commonly in possession than any other book. Of course they were Latin Bibles.

#### IX. CIRCULATION OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

When, however, we turn from Latin Bibles to the English, called Wyclif's, but written at his instigation rather than by him, we are amazed to learn, on the sound authority of Dr. Guppy (Librarian of John Ryland's Library), that

"not fewer than a hundred and eighty copies of English Bibles, or portions of the Bible have survived the organised and relentless efforts carried on throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth century to destroy them. None of these appear to have been written later than 1450. Half the copies are of small size such as could be made the constant daily companion of their owner. Many of them probably owed their survival to the high rank of those to whom they belonged; one was the property of Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, another of Henry VI, and another of Richard III."

With these facts before us we cannot doubt that reading of the English Bible, and listening to it read by Wyclif's "Simple Priest" prepared the way for the Reformation of the sixteenth century. In homes of the poor, in secluded woodland haunts, the flame kindled by Wyclif was kept alive, though it seemed to have been successfully smothered by the Church.

To appreciate fully what Wyclif, under the Providence of God accomplished, we must first do justice to the ideal of the medieval Universities. That ideal was to bring all knowledge into correspondence with Revelation. Thus Theology, of which the apex was study of Scripture, was Queen of the Sciences. But in the process of study Theology had become an arid science of abstract attributes of God, a wearisome discussion of problems that had no relation

<sup>1</sup> A good illustration of this occurs in a Franciscan constitution *circa* 1292. "Let no brother have a Bible or Testament out of charity, unless he be apt for study or fit to preach."

to life. For ordinary folk it was unapproachable, and they who had laboriously acquired the key of this knowledge were not disposed to make it cheap. What Wyclif did was not merely to open the door to knowledge of God, but to carry it out of the Universities into highways and hedges, and to make the ploughman and artisan hear the voice of God, not in Latin but in their own tongue. The voice so heard was the voice of the "living God,"<sup>1</sup> no longer far off, and approachable only through a graduated hierarchy of priests, saints, the Blessed Virgin, Angels and Archangels, but the voice of the God Who was the "friend" of Abraham in the tent, the companion and guide of Jacob as he tended Laban's flocks, the protector of David in the valley of the shadow of death, the voice of the Friend of publicans and sinners. To the learned Doctor of Divinity such treatment of the Bible was rank desecration, profane casting of pearls before swine, and above all the destruction of the learning which he had acquired at great cost, and on which he depended for his living. What Paul's gospel was to the silversmiths of Ephesus, Wyclif's Bible was to the Divines of the medieval Universities. For more than a century the Schoolmen with the aid of the Church triumphed successfully, as they believed, over this arch-heresy. But they forgot, "the stars in their courses fought," "the Providence of God fought" against the entrenched strongholds of medievalism. What Oxford defeated, Cambridge carried to a successful issue. Coverdale was the spiritual heir of Wyclif. Nor was England so completely robbed of pre-eminence in the Reformation world as John Milton imagined, for England is the home of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which counts its yearly issues of Scripture "in every nation and kindred and tongue," by millions. Oxford was not "the home of lost causes" when Lollardy was crushed. The last of the Schoolmen was the first of the Reformers.

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Gardiner said that a heretic could be known by his constant mention of "the living God."

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Three booklets issued in the Lutterworth Press Papers are: *The Edict of Nantes and Afterwards, 1685-1935*, by Henry J. Cowell, Fellow of the Huguenot Society of London. This has been issued in a revised and illustrated form, and should be read by English people in order that they may realise what the Huguenots have suffered and done. *Man and His Need of God* contains Broadcast Talks by J. S. Whale, President of Cheshunt College, Cambridge. It is reprinted from *The Way to God*. Nearly two hundred people wrote to ask questions after the addresses, and the answers are summarised in a useful way. *Church Unity* is by Dr. A. J. Macdonald and is an urgent plea for unity.