

can be; so that probably the best form of a council now is one which consists of Bishop, clergy, and laity.

The opinion of the Dean will be found on page 158 of THE CHURCHMAN.

The Bishop of Ripon and the Dean of Carlisle will be ranked as evangelical churchmen. Both of them have looked with some suspicion on the diocesan movement, but though among the latest adherents none, as it will be seen, can be more ardent in their support of the Diocesan Conference. The Bishop of Ripon, at his recent Conference in October last, having explained the reluctance with which he was prevailed upon to move by the pressure exerted upon him by the body of the Church itself, gave in his hearty adhesion to the principle as one which must henceforward be recognised as an indispensable condition of healthy Church life, and then added, "the experience of two years has swept to the winds any lingering doubts that might have existed in my own mind." With the opinion expressed by the venerable Dean of Carlisle at the last Conference in that city, I will bring this article to a close:—

This Conference is just the thing we want—that is, a fair representation of clergy and laity in the council of the Church. Bishops are not the Church, the clergy are not the Church, the laity are not the Church; but the Bishops, priests, and deacons acting in wise accordance with the people, constitute the Church of England. The times in which we live are just adapted for such a Church, and we ought to be thankful if to this ancient structure and machinery, many parts of which have become rusty and useless, we can apply new springs of power and wisdom, which may make it a grand source of reformation, if it be needed, to the Church of England.¹

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ART. II.—CHAUCER AND WYCLIFFE.

1. H. SIMON, of Schmalkalden. *Chaucer a Wycliffite*. Chaucer Society's Essays, Pt. III.
2. REINHOLD PAULI. *Bilder aus Alt-England*. Gotha. 2^{te} Aufl. 1876.
3. G. V. LECHLER. *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*. Leipzig. 1873.

RELIGIOUS reformations have invariably been preceded and attended by times of intellectual excitement and activity, prolific in men who, by voice or pen, have loudly inveighed

¹ *The Guardian*, Oct. 8, 1879.

against the corruption of manners and the vices of the clergy. It would be idle to deny the services which such men have rendered in preparing the way for the triumph of the truth, even though they have not themselves been preachers of righteousness in any sense. By undermining the authority of an arrogant hierarchy, by tearing the veil of hypocrisy from the face of an ignorant and debased priesthood, and by breaking the spell under which the people had been held enthralled, they have at least served to enlist the sympathy of the masses with the coming change, and greatly contributed to the success of the Reformation; but it is equally certain that to protest against open and shameless demoralisation, to expose vices and abuses which shock the common sense and decency of society, does not require the possession of real religion, nor even the mere intellectual apprehension of doctrinal truth. Some of the most unsparing denunciations of the corruptions of the Romish Church have been uttered by men who never severed themselves from her communion, who held firmly by all her errors, and who even founded new monastic orders in the vain hope of remodelling her constitution on the old lines, or by others whose attacks were really aimed at Christianity itself, not at the deformed image in which it was presented to their readers.

In our own country, while the godly vicar of Lutterworth, John of Wicliffe, protected by the generous but dissolute prince John of Gaunt, was preaching against some of the errors of the Church of which he was a priest, and was engaged along with Hereford and Purvey in translating the Word of God into the language of the people, three poets, Gower, Langland, and Chaucer, each from a different standpoint, joined in exposing the corruption of society in general, and the vices of the monks and friars in particular.

Gower, in his "*Vox Clamantis*," which being written in Latin was evidently addressed rather to the more learned clergy than to the people, and the title of which was suggested by the character of John the Baptist, mercilessly handles peasant and noble, prelate and monk, soldier and lawyer in turn, but shows by the sermon in the second book, that he had no sympathy with the doctrines of Wicliffe, however convinced of the necessity of a moral reformation. He deservedly earned the title of the Moral Gower, but was to the last a sincere Romanist in his creed.

Langland was a man of a very different stamp; born of poor parents, he was schooled in adversity; a clerk in minor orders, too proud to seek preferment by sacrificing his principles, he earned a miserable subsistence by singing dirges at the funerals of the rich. His existence, embittered by penury and blighted hopes, was in melancholy harmony with the crisis of the nation's

life. To him the times were out of joint, and little hope had he of better days. In the vision of Long Will, concerning Piers the plowman, the hero of this "pilgrim's progress," or politico-theological allegory, a long and varied train of characters passes in grim procession before his eyes, but with the single exception of poor Piers the plowman, presenting every form of moral deformity, without one redeeming feature. The powers of darkness seem all abroad, prelates and monks fattening on the revenues of the Church lands, mendicant friars practising every kind of imposture on their dupes, a poor and ignorant secular clergy, peasants and artisans profiting by the dearth of labour consequent on the recent plagues to live in bold idleness or gluttonous indulgence, brutal barons taking advantage of the extinction of villeinage to evict their labourers, driving them to insolent beggary or lawless life, while Parliament seeks to repress the impending revolution by the most rigorous and oppressive measures, rich and poor fearing and feared, hateful and hating one another.

Still diverse from Gower and Langland was the character of Geoffrey Chaucer; his career was indeed chequered, but his trials served only to chasten the native joyousness of his gentle mind. The greater part of his life was passed in comparative ease; he had moved and made friends in every rank of society except the highest and the lowest, and with wondrous dramatic power, exquisite art, and a happy mixture of kindly sympathy and harmless raillery, he depicts the manners of the motley group of pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. True, his satire becomes sharp enough as he relentlessly holds up to scorn the pardoner and the friar, but even here we miss the stern invective, the scathing indignation, of the ascetic Langland. Yet we must remember that the popularity which the Canterbury Tales rapidly obtained among all classes rendered Chaucer's milder irony far more obnoxious to the clergy than the bitter censure, the unconcealed hatred, expressed in the "Vision," addressed, too, as it was, to a public very few of whom were able to read.

We know how it was sedulously reported that Chaucer before his death had made his peace with the Church, how a retraction, the spuriousness of which is universally admitted, was appended to his works, and we need not therefore be surprised to find that there is good reason to believe that that part of the poem which touches most closely on the points at issue between Wicliffe and the Church of Rome has been grossly tampered with by clerical copyists. The labours of a little band of learned and devoted students had already condemned as spurious several entire poems commonly attributed to Chaucer, when Mr. H. Simon, of Schmalkalden, struck like many others with the inconsistencies

and self-contradictions of the Parson's Tale, has with the critical acumen of a true German scholar after a laborious and exhaustive analysis of the Tale succeeded in separating the interpolations from the genuine work, and shown that the poet was not the elegant sceptic he is usually considered to have been, but a sincere partisan of the doctrines, no less than an admirer of the character, of the Reformers.

Passing over the lay personages in the prologue we have a monk, ironically said to be certain of preferment, richly dressed and mounted, fond of good living and passionately addicted to the chase. A wanton friar, who "knew the tavernes wel in every toun," "an esy man to geve penaunce" and "the beste beggere in his hous," and a Pardoner, even more contemptible with wallet "bret ful of pardoun come from Rome al hot," and relics of the most incredible value, including a glass of "pigges bones" with which—

Upon a day he gat him more moneye
Than that the persoun gat in monthes tweye,
And thus with feyned flaterie and japes,
He made the persoun and the people his apes.

In striking contrast to these repulsive characters stands the "Poure persoun" . . . "riche of holy thought and werk," . . . "also a lerned man, a clerk"—

That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche,
Benigne he was and wonder diligent,
And in adversité ful pacient.
Wyde was his parische,
But he ne lafte not for reyne ne thonder,
In sicknesse nor in mischief to visite
The ferreste in his parissche, moche and lite,
A noble ensample to his scheep he gaf.

He did not seek preferment, like too many of the clergy of that day—

But dwelt at hoom and kepte wel his folde,
So that the wolf ne made it not mescarye.
He was a schepherde and no mercenarie,
And though he holy were and vertuous,
He was to sinful man nought despitous,
To drawe folk to heven by fairnesse,
By good ensample, this was his busynesse.

He would sharply reprove the obstinate without respect of persons, and lastly—

But Cristes lore and his apostles twelve
He taughte, but first he folwede it himselve.

Such is the description of the Parson which, as Mr. Simon says, "has hundreds of times been quoted as the ideal of Christian charity and humility, evangelical piety and unselfish resignation to the high calling of a pastor," yet we cannot deny that such characters have been found among the parish priests even in the bosom of the Church of Rome. But let us examine it more closely; the first feature on which the poet dwells is that he taught the gospel in its purity—

That Cristes gospel trewely wolde he preche
Out of the gospel he the wordes caught, &c.

This was the essential character of the preaching of Wicliffe and his party, by which they were distinguished from the rest of the clergy, who would not allow the sole authority of the Scriptures. Scarcely less characteristic were their irreproachable holiness of life, which their worst enemies dared not gainsay, and their earnest appreciation of learning in the service of the truth. Ignorance no less than laxity of morals was the rule in the regular orders; learning was confined to the secular clergy, from among whom Wicliffe recruited his associates.

Lastly, in his pastoral visits, our parson goes "uppon his feet and in his hand a staf," just as Wicliffe's itinerant preachers are said to have gone about by Henry Knighton, Canon of Leicester, Thomas Walsingham, a Benedictine of St. Albans, and other historians of that period. At the same time it cannot be Wicliffe himself who is portrayed, for he did not travel, nor was he ever a *poor* parson.

Leaving the picture of the man himself as given by Chaucer, let us turn for a moment to the language and behaviour of his companions. When the parson firmly but gently remonstrates with the rollicking innkeeper for taking God's name in vain, Harry Baily derisively remarks—

I smell a loller in the wind.

But receiving no answer, as he had expected, points directly at the parson, and with another profane oath exclaims—

We schal have a predicacioun
This loller here wol prechen us somewhat.
Nay, by my fader soule! that schal he not.
Sayde the schipman, Here shall he not preche:
He schal no gospel glosen here, ne teche.

No greater insult could have been offered to an "orthodox" priest than this of calling him a Lollard. If our parson did not admit the impeachment, he must in self-respect and for the sake of the company have indignantly repudiated it. But he does nothing of the kind; he did not indeed feel bound to proclaim

himself a heretic, and thus to provoke opposition, but silently waits the opportunity of giving them, when he shall be called on to speak, a few simple words in season. Again, however unwelcome might be the expectation of a sermon of any sort, how could such harangues as they were accustomed to hear from the preaching friars, made up of stories from the lives of the saints, legends sacred and profane, the "Gesta Romanorum," and even Ovid's "Metamorphoses," the whole spiced with coarse jokes and with jingling rhymes, be described as "gospel glosing?" Such preaching Wicliffe denounced with all his soul. Everywhere in his sermons we find condemnations of the "Gesta vel cronicas mundiales," "Gesta, poemata vel fabulas," "Colores rithmicos," and "formam metricam." "Debet evangelisator predicare," says he, "plane evangelicam veritatem." The parson was a Wicliffite, and all the pilgrims knew it. At length the bully of an innkeeper, rudely as he had treated the monk and the "nonnes priest," is disarmed by the gentle behaviour and dignified meekness with which the parson had borne the jeers and thrusts of the rougher members of the party. He respectfully invites him to favour them with a fable, only stipulating that it be a short one, as the day is nearly spent. He even attempts a little flattery, an unmistakable testimony on the poet's part to the conduct, the peaceful disposition, and influence of the Lollard or Wicliffite preachers. To this invitation the parson accedes on certain conditions—

Thou getest fable noon i told from me
 For Poul that writeth unto Timothé,
 Repreveth hem that weyveth sothfastnesse,¹
 And tellen fables, and such wrecchednesse.
 Why schuld I sowen draf² out of my fest,
 Whan I may sowë whete, if that me list?
 For which I say, if that you lust to hiere
 Moralité and vertuous matiere,
 And thanne that ye wil geve me audience,
 I wol ful fayn at Cristes reverence
 Do you plesauncé leful,³ as I can.
 But trusteth wel, I am a suthern man,
 I can not gestë,⁴ rum, ram, ruf,⁵ by letter,
 Ne, God wot, rym hold I but litel better.
 And therefor, if you lust, I wol not glose,
 I wol you tel a merry tale in prose,
 To knyte up al this fest, and make an ende;
 And Jhesu, for his gracë," wit me sende⁶
 To schewë you the way, in this viage

¹ Them that waive (or pass by) truth.

² Draf—rubbish.

³ Lawful pleasure.

⁴ Gestë—to tell romances.

⁵ Use alliteration.

⁶ Send me wisdom.

Of thilke parfyt, glorious pilgrimage
That hath Jerusalem celestial.

His appeal to the authority of St. Paul in the Epistles to Timothy when declining to favour the company with a fable, is eminently characteristic. Nowhere does the Apostle expatiate so fully on the right discharge of the office of a pastor, or warn his readers so earnestly against false doctrine and enforced celibacy and abstinence. They were special favourites of Wicliffe, and the caution against *fables*, which occurs no less than four times in these and that to Titus, is echoed again and again in the writings of the Reformer. He who put such words into the mouth of the parson must have been acquainted with the sermons of Wicliffe.¹

Nor need we be surprised at finding a Wicliffite preacher taking part in a pilgrimage, or as he advisedly calls it a "*viage*" to Canterbury. The shrine of à Becket was indeed the destination of the others, but there also were the tombs of Augustine, the first missionary to the Saxons, and of Ethelbert, his royal convert, there was the first English church, there too were the tombs of Langton, the champion of our national liberties, and of the Black Prince, the idol of the people; but above all, in the concourse of superstitious pilgrims from all parts of the kingdom, he would find a rich field for his evangelical labours. That he attached himself to one of these parties was a mere precaution against the perils of the road. The Tale itself, being purely a religious discourse without any reference to mediæval romances, has not received at the hands of critics the attention that has been bestowed on the others for the sources of the materials of which the literature of East and West has been ransacked.

But no one who has read it with the least care can fail to have remarked its inconsistency not only with the character of the speaker, but with its own self. Side by side with the language of Scripture, and the simple evangelical doctrine of repentance and forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ alone, are long disquisitions concerning the degrees of guilt depending on circumstances of time and place which might have been culled from Peter Dens, and an exposition of enormous length on the seven deadly sins. Passages which irresistibly recall the language of our reformed communion office jostle others insist-

¹ Objection has not unnaturally been taken to the coarseness of much of Chaucer's writings. It must be remembered, however, that in the age in which he lived, and indeed for nearly two hundred years after, the common language of society was marked by an utter absence of refinement or even of modesty. Besides, it may be mentioned that the prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale is composed almost wholly of free translations from Jerome *adversus Jovinianum* and Theophrastus *de Nuptiis* and Tertullian *de monogamiâ* as quoted by Jerome in his work.

ing on the necessity of auricular confession and priestly absolution, and are followed by a minute description of the various forms of private and public penance.

But when we come to a critical examination of the Tale as a literary production, the clumsiness of the forgery becomes patent. Every rule of composition and of grammar is violated, theses and definitions are contradicted by their illustrations, the order of the several points is repeated or inverted, and the tedious digressions are marked by decided differences in language and idiom. Once the interpolator got confused between the personalities of the parson and the poet, and makes the former "a lerned man, a clerk," . . . "leve to divines so heigh a doctrine" as the exposition of "the Ten Commandments!"

The perfect symmetry of every other work of Chaucer's, his mastery of the arts of composition, the transparency and logical accuracy of his sentences, are well known to every student of his writings. It is remarkable how the Tale, judged from a purely literary standpoint, gains by the elimination of the foreign matter. It now forms a concise, yet clear and complete statement of the views of Wicliffe's party on the doctrine of repentance; it is perfect as a work of art, and excellent in every part; it is in entire harmony with the character of the Parson; and, lastly, it is, what the corrupt version most certainly is not, in compliance with the express wish of the host, short.

The plan of the Tale may be thus stated. The preacher, wishing to "improve the occasion" of the pilgrimage by proving that true penitence does not consist in any such works of satisfaction or self-imposed penance, but in turning from sin, in repentance and faith in Christ, takes for his text a passage from the Prophet Jeremiah (vi. 16), evidently chosen with a view to turn the thoughts of his hearers from the innovations of the Romish Church to the primitive doctrine of Christianity. He then gives a definition of penitence according to St. Ambrose, and "some doctor," adding a third of his own. The explanation of the word itself, which he had promised, is omitted; probably it has been excised by the copyist. Next, he discusses the things which should move a man to repentance, enumerating (1) the remembrance of his sins; (2) the consciousness of slavery implied in sin; (3) dread of future punishment; (4) the sorrowful remembrance of good left undone and of happiness lost; (5) the remembrance of the sufferings of Christ for our sins; (6) the hope of forgiveness, the gift of grace to do well, and the glory of heaven; secondly, the "manner of contrition," and, lastly, the fruits of repentance. Such is the pure gold of this gospel sermon, separated from the dross in which it has been smothered by monkish scribes.

The subject of the Parson's Tale, or "Meditacioun" as he

calls it, is that of Wicliffe's "Wicket," the manner of treating it is the same; nay, more, the very words are, in numberless instances, borrowed from the works of the great reformer. The palpably spurious portions are those treating of the three "acciouns and the three spices (*i.e.*, *kinds*) of penitence"; "the laste thing (*viz.*) whereof availeth contricioun" which follows the sixth of the six things which should move a man to repentance; the whole of the "secounde partye of penitence" of which no first part has been indicated in the introduction; and the dissertation on the seven deadly sins, much of which is too obscene for general reading; in fact, the remaining three-fourths or more of the Tale, except the closing section on the "fruyts of penitence," which is genuine. These additions have necessitated numerous minor interpolations or alterations in the text of the introductory part, which Mr. Simon has pointed out, besides which there are many passages in the sections on the things which should move a man to penitence found in the Lansdowne or other MSS., but wanting in the Harleian, which look very suspicious.

It is scarcely necessary to add that the "Preces de Chauceres" which is made in some copies a part of the Parson's Tale, and in others added as a sort of death-bed recantation of the poet's, is utterly unworthy of notice.

To persons not familiar with the domestic history of those times it might seem incredible that such wholesale falsification could be perpetrated on a work of so popular a poet. There is, however, good reason to believe that Chaucer did not publish the Parson's Tale in his lifetime. Since no contemporary MS. of the Canterbury Tales exists, this must remain a matter of conjecture; but Lydgate, some years after Chaucer's death, speaks of the Tale of Melibeus as the only piece of prose among them, whereas that of the Parson, had he known of it, would have possessed special interest to him as an ecclesiastic. The author, too, had good reasons for suppressing his sermon on penitence.

After Wat Tyler's insurrection had been put down, Wicliffe was falsely accused by his enemies of having contributed by his preaching to the popular rising. His doctrines were condemned by the Synod of 1382, and he was deprived of his professorship, though he was protected from further persecution by the influence of the Queen, and of John of Gaunt until his death, which occurred in 1384. In 1386 a change of government took place: the Duke of Gloucester superseded John of Gaunt, who was driven from power, and with the fall of his patron Chaucer was deprived of his lucrative office. From 1388 to the end of the century, *i.e.*, to the time of Chaucer's death, the persecution of the Lollards waxed hotter, until Archbishop Arundel, who had

succeeded Courtney in the see of Canterbury, induced the usurper Henry IV. to pay for his assistance by the bloody statute *De Comburendo Heretico*.

Chaucer was now old and infirm; a poor layman, dependent for his subsistence on the charity of the court, he could not feel himself called on to provoke persecution, and to forfeit his means of living by making public a work which would inevitably have brought on him the indignation of the ruling powers; but kept it to himself until the storm of persecution should have passed, or he should have been removed by death. Chaucer died in the little house in the gardens of St. Mary's, Westminster, which he held on lease from the Abbey, surrounded doubtless in his last hours by the monks who constituted themselves his literary executors. The *Parson's Tale*, of which, as we have seen, Lydgate was ignorant, did not probably appear till between 1410-20, the date of our earliest MS., when Lewis Chaucer, the poet's only son, had long been dead, if indeed he survived his father, and there was no one who cared to identify the poet's handwriting, or possibly had ever seen the original *Tale*.

That the monks, when the persecution of the Lollards was at its height, when the writings of Wycliffe were being hunted up and committed to the flames, and his followers brought to the stake, should have themselves published so heretical a work is inconceivable: they might have destroyed it, but felt that the production of an orthodox essay on penitence, inculcating the necessity of auricular confession, of penance and priestly absolution, proving that whatever doubts he might have entertained in his lifetime, the poet of the people at least died a "Catholic" at peace with the Church, would be a triumph, the moral effect of which would be incalculable. They had plenty of leisure for a complete falsification of the work, though the forgers, who were obviously clerics, seemed to have found the transformation of the *Tale* no easy task.

Mr. Simon has done the cause of learning and truth good service, but there is still ample scope for a further revision of the *Parson's Tale* by collation with the writings of Wycliffe, though it would be well to postpone the attempt until the completion of the sixth text edition of the *Tales*, which the Chaucer Society has in hand.

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