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THE PACIFISM OF JOHN WYCLIF

BY

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"So Gods lawe techis men to come bifore in dedes of charite and werkes of worschip; bot I rede not in Gods law that Cristen men schulden cum byfore in feghting or batel, bot in meke pacience."

"And certis, Crists meene is more light, more short, and more siker, for fendis contynuen werre, and maken fals pees to more werre."

John Wyclif

The Pacifism of John Wyclif

I

Introduction

The movement called by the name of pacifism is of comparatively recent origin, but the opinions which it represents are by no means new. In practically every century since the days of Jesus of Nazareth there have been a few of his followers who, either as individuals or as members of rather insignificant sects, have declared their belief that war was not a Christian method of attaining any end, and have maintained that they as followers of Jesus could not take part in it. Unlike some of the Oriental groups who have taken the same attitude toward war, the position of these Christian "pacifists" has been in no sense a negative one. They have merely differed with the rest of the world on the proper method to be used, substituting an aggressive love and good will in place of arms and slaughter. The term "pacifism" therefore, is more often than not very much of a misnomer, but since such words as "non-violent coercion" are only very slowly coming into general use, it is doubtless better to use the more popular term, expecting that its connotation and meaning will change with time.

For surely such an aggressive, fearless, original personality as that of John Wyclif cannot be described by any negative term. He is not known to the world as a pacifist. In his own time he was known as one of the greatest of the scholastics, a philosopher and theologian who stood second to none, whose brilliant exposition and defense of what may be called the Nonconformist views in theology won for him the enmity of the official Church. In our day it is as a forerunner of Protestantism that John Wyclif holds a place, and his theology has been discussed at great length, in order to show that it was the basis for the teachings of Hus in Bohemia, and for the Elizabethan settlement in England, and that his ideas were substantially the same as those which Luther held at a later date. Some slight attention has also been given to his conception of Christian communism, based on his theory of "Dominion," or the right by which men hold property. But with regard to his views on war, the scholars have been almost entirely silent, although those opinions occupy in his writings much more space than his views on communism. So it happens that John Wyclif is known as an Oxford scholastic, a great philosopher, a brilliant theologian, and a "pre-reformation" reformer - but a pacifist, no. That he was a pacifist, however, and a pacifist of the most vigorous and uncompromising stripe, it is the purpose of this paper to show.

II

The Origins and Expression of his Pacifism

Wyclif was born about 1320 and died in 1384. In the generation preceding, Dante had produced his Divine Comedy. Before Wyclif was born, in 1305, the Popes had become subservient to the French king and had moved to Avignon, where they remained for seventy years. While he was a boy, Marsiglio of Padua of the University of Paris was expounding his advanced ideas on political science. While Wyclif was in Oxford, studying the "Summa" of Thomas Aquinas, Petrarch was writing his sonnets to Laura and delving into the ancient Latin authors. Throughout Europe it was an age of change, of restless seeking after new things.

In England the study of medieval scholasticism was producing thinkers and philosophers like William of Occam, known as the "Invincible Doctor." Out of the middle class came Geoffrey Chaucer, genial and shrewd, satirizing the evils of his time. From the great inarticulate mass of peasants, seething with discontent, came spirits like William Langland, author or co-author of that rugged protest, "The Vision of Piers Plowman." And from a middle class family of Yorkshire came John of Wyclif, who was to be called the "Morning star of the Reformation."

While he was still a young man, the Black Death had swept over England leaving men fearful and wondering, and thoughtful about things of the spirit. At the same time, hand in hand with the loss of prestige by the popes, there was developing a spirit of independent thinking fostered by the universities. Men were no longer so subservient to authority. It is not surprising that it should be a period of social revolt and religious rebellion. It is in such an age that we must seek to find the roots of Wyclif's views on war.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there had sprung up on the continent several heretical sects which held very strong opinions against war. One would naturally expect that there might be some connecting link between these groups and the ideas of Wyclif. It is almost certain, however, that such is not the case. England, up to the time of Wyclif, had not been an hospitable field for heretical groups. No heretical sect had ever sprung up on English soil, and the two attempts at transplantation had met a bloody end. Nor did the writings of these sects find their way into England. Wyclif, in all his volumes of English and Latin writings, never even mentions such a well-known sect as the Waldenses. Nor are there any references in his works that would show that he had any knowledge of or any leaning toward the opinions of any of the heretical sects. We may be quite sure that his opinions on war

did not come from this source. (1)

When a man's opinions cannot be traced to association with any group, it is natural to look to his teachers for the inspiration of his ideas. Yet, in Wyclif's case, we are again baffled. We do not know just who his teachers were during his years at Oxford, but from his writings we can quite easily gather the names of those who were his intellectual fathers. None of them, however, seems to be tainted with pacifism.

Marsiglio of Padua, to whom Wyclif is probably debtor for some of his political ideas, was the author of the "Defensor Pacis," and held ideas about the sovereign power of the people which were well in advance of his time. Yet he seems to have had no message against war. Nor in William of Occam, with whose philosophy Wyclif was undoubtedly familiar, do we find anything which might have served as the germ of a pacifist philosophy. (2)

(1). Gotthard Victor Lechler, John Wycliffe and his English Precursors, translated by Peter Lorimer (London 1884), Page 52., "In a word, it is irreconcilable with the known facts of history to attempt to bring the inner development of Wycliffe or his followers into connection with any earlier manifestation of heresy on the European continent. And, in England itself, the history of the centuries before Wycliffe has not a single manifestation of the heretical kind to show which was of any continuance or of any importance." Ibid, Page 54.

(2). Ibid, Page 47.

From the three ecclesiastics most quoted by Wyclif, we may be quite sure he found no support for his belief that a follower of Jesus could not take part in war. Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, believed that the Church should wield both the spiritual and the material sword, although the actual use of the latter was reserved for the loyal subjects of the Church, the princes. Professor Lechler admits that from some of his works "one might easily receive the impression that this energetic man was all too fond of strife, if not even a hierarch of haughty and imperious temper." (3) Surely no one could have learned pacifism from him. Richard FitzRalph, or Richard of Armagh, who was Chancellor of Oxford from 1333 to 1347, is another churchman whom Wyclif quotes very frequently, but his works seem to be wholly on church affairs. (4) And the third prelate whom Wyclif very much respected, is Thomas Bradwardine, a writer of several theological works, and, what is more important for our purpose, the personal chaplain to Edward III on nearly all of his military campaigns. He too is certainly absolved from any connection with anti-warlike opinions. (5)

In spite of the fact that we can not find any pacifist tendencies among those writers who immediately influenced the reformer, we are hardly justified in supposing that his ideas sprang full fledged from his own mind. A study of "The Vision of Piers Plowman" will show that among the straightforward,

(3) Ibid, Page 25.
(4) Ibid, Pages 55 - 59.
(5) Ibid, Pages 64 ff.

rugged folk of the countryside Christ's teachings were taken more literally than they were by the learned doctors. The very central idea of the "visions" is the brotherhood of man.

> "For alle are we Crystes creatures, and of his coffres riche,
> And brethren as of o blode, as wel beggares as erles." (6)

As one writer has put it, the kernel of its teaching is "a love of our neighbor reaching its highest point in patient forbearance, and love towards our enemies." (7)

That Wyclif had actual knowledge of "Piers Plowman" would be hard to prove. Probably he did. But that he had contact with the same spirit that produced it, - that he was acquainted with the longings and the eager strivings of the peasants - there can hardly be a question. His English works especially, being addressed to his more ignorant hearers, reflect very much the same demand for honesty and sincerity, the same hatred for sham and hypocrisy, and the same belief in the teachings of Jesus rather than in theology, that marks "Piers Plowman." Professor Manly puts the situation thus: "The more intimately we learn to know the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the more clearly do we see, not only Grosstete, and Ockam, and Richard of Armagh, but a host of forgotton or nameless men who battled for justice and kindliness and intellectual and spiritual light, and our study of the Piers the Plowman cluster of poems has shown us that

(6) J. M. Manly, "Piers the Plowman and its Sequence," in the Cambridge History of English Literature. edited by A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge, 1907-17), II, Page 34.
(7) Lechler, Page 70.

that confused voice and that mighty vision were the voice and vision, not of one lonely, despised wanderer, but of many men who, though of diverse tempers and gift cherished the same enthusiasm for righteousness and hate of evil." (8) Wyclif, as his sermons suggest, had been intimate with that "host of forgotton or nameless men," and out of this intellectual ferment among the common people came, in all likelihood, the inspiration or the confirmation for many of his pacifist ideas.

One of the forces, however, which had produced this stirring of men's minds was also the main source of Wyclif's extreme views on war. It is the one source to which we can point with absolute certainty as a pacifist influence in the reformer's life. It is a small collection of books which have been responsible for more upheavals in the world's history than any other library. It is a collection of writings centering about a young Jewish Rabbi, which we call the New Testament. Here, in the uncompromising ideas of Jesus, Wyclif found the basis of his thinking and writing on the war question. How he used his Bible, what was the basis for his belief that Jesus would not have sanctioned war, are questions which will be taken up directly. At present it is only to be noticed that his heretical theology and his heretical political views, which included his pacifism, sprang from the same root, the teachings of Jesus.

(8) Manly, Cambridge History of English Literature, II, Page 48.

So much, then, for the origins of his ideas on non-resistance. In studying a man's opinions, however, it is often of as much value to study their development and growth as to determine their origins. A comparison of the different books in which Wyclif gives expression to his pacifist views, however, shows us that we are denied the opportunity of watching his opinions on this subject evolve into their finished form. There is so very little difference of viewpoint in the various works that it is practically negligible. Only indeed when one examines the dates of all of Wyclif's works,- those in which he is silent on war, as well as those in which he gives vigorous expression to his views - is the significant fact discovered that there is no hint of pacifism in any of his writings prior to 1377. In the several volumes written previous to that date, there is no mention of his views on war; after 1377 there are few books that do not at least contain an indication of what his ideas were. Stated thus baldly, it would appear that at some time about 1377 he became a pacifist. In the opinion of the writer, however, such is not the case.

Wyclif's silence is partially explained by the fact that the books which he produced previous to 1377 were strictly scholastic, theological and philosophical. They bear within them the stamp of a profuse, dialectical orthodoxy. Three volumes of Logic, a volume on "Being" (De Ente) and one on

the "Incarnation" (De Benedicta Incarnacione) - these are the titles and suggest the scope of some of his earlier works. In looking them over, one's first reaction is a feeling of wonder that modern men should have given years of their lives in order to compare and collate and publish the manuscripts. They seem so dryly scholastic, so very abstruse, and are written so exclusively for their own age. Naturally, there is no need and no opportunity for a man to express his views on war when he is discussing such subjects, so very technical and remote from everyday life. But in the astounding number of books which he wrote between 1377 and 1384 the subjects are such as would allow his pacifist views to be brought in - a discussion of civil dominion or sovereignty, a discussion of the secular order of society and the duties of the king, all sorts of tracts about the life of the church and its conduct and management, biblical exegesis - such subjects breathe more of the breath of actual life and give Wyclif the opportunity to express himself on many current questions. It is natural that in these latter books his opinions on war should crop out.

Another and even stronger reason for believing that after 1377 he only gave expression to views on war which he had already held for some time, is that his opinions on the subject change so little in the last seven years of his life. The first work in which he defines his attitude toward war is "De Civili

Dominio" (9) written in 1377. It is a clear and vigorous statement of his views, with a very idealistic, a very spiritual touch. Throughout the discussion the central theme is that patience is better than revenge, and that we are bound to love our neighbor above all goods. "But in war it is impossible to do this, therefore in war it is impossible not to sin, and consequently it is not permitted to a Catholic to fight." Without going into his thought in detail here, it may be said that in this treatise he either sketches or expounds all of the main arguments against war which he uses in his later works. In his "De Officio Regis" (10) written in 1378, he gives a more didactical and rambling exposition of his views, with practically nothing new beyond what he had written the year before. In his "De Fide Catholica," (11) dated by experts at about 1383 he is inclined to be a bit more argumentative upon the question, and not so content with merely stating his own views. In his English work "On the Seven Deadly Sins" (12) which was produced during the last two years of his life, he is

(9) Johannis Wyclif, De Civili Dominio, edited by Johann Loserth (London, 1900), II, Pages 233ff.
(10) Johannis Wyclif, Tractatus de Officio Regis, edited by A. W. Pollard and Charles Sayle (London, 1887), Pages 260ff.
(11) Johannis Wyclif, Opera Minora, edited by Johann Loserth (London, 1913), pages 119ff.
(12) Select English Works of John Wyclif, edited by Thomas Arnold. (Oxford, 1871), III, Pages 135ff.

still more argumentative. One cannot help but wonder whether, if he had lived longer, he might have become as intolerant of the views of others as Luther became in his later years. At any rate, there is no advance in his ideas of pacifism during this seven year period, and neither is there any decline, except in the spirit of the writings. Had he been a new convert to the idea of pacifism in 1377, his thinking would almost certainly have undergone some changes during that active and productive period, when so many of his opinions were taking new shape.

Still the question of 1377 remains unsolved. Why 1377? What occurred then to change his line of subject matter, and the character of his works? A reference to the facts of his life will, perhaps, make that clear. It was in 1376 and 1377 that Wyclif's theological opinions were first brought under suspicion of heresy. A Convocation of London, under Courtenay, Bishop of London, cited him to appear with certain theses which he had published. The trial was a curious commentary upon the state of the times. Wyclif went to the Convocation under the protection of the Duke of Lancaster, and before he was even called upon to speak, the Duke and the Bishop disputed so violently whether the alleged heretic should stand up or sit down while answering to the charges, that the trial was broken up. (13).

From this time forward he was never free from some sort

(13). Lechler, Page 158.

of charges. From this time forward also, partly due no doubt to his own persecution, and partly due to the papal schism, occurring in 1378, which completely disillusioned him, he definitely took the part of the reformer, caring less and less whether he had Church sanction or not. His utterances became bold and no longer submissive to the authority of the Bishop of Rome. At such a time, as at a similar period in the life of Luther, many ideas which he had held only loosely and vaguely, crystallized and became a part of his convictions. It is therefore perfectly possible that at this time his ideas on war took much more definite shape than before. That they first occurred to him at this time is, we repeat, improbable.

During the seven year period in which Wyclif was doing such a large proportion of his writing he suffered several interruptions. In 1378 he was brought to trial again, this time before some Papal commissioners, who had been instructed to root out the heretic if possible. But this time it was the Princess of Wales, the widow of the Black Prince, who intervened in his behalf and advised the commissioners not to pronounce any final judgement on the case. Wisely accepting her warning, they practically acquitted him. (14)

In 1382 his old enemy, Courtenay, having been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, began an attempt to drive Wyclif and his followers out of the Church. He was largely successful with

(14) Ibid, Page 172.

the main leaders of Wyclif's party, but Wyclif himself was only examined and never condemned, doubtless for fear of Parliament. It is probable that he was summoned to Rome in the next year, and pleaded ill health as an excuse for not going. Before anything further had come of it, he was stricken with paralysis, and died in December, 1384. (15).

This outline of the years of his persecution suffices to show why there may have been reasons for a rather sharp change in the subject matter and tone of his writings from 1377 on. It also gives a necessary background for many of the statements which are quoted in the following pages. His invectives against crusades, and indeed all of his opinions regarding war which involve a criticism of the Church take on a new meaning and acquire new depth and vigor when we realize that they were written by a man in danger of his life - written with the full knowledge that these writings would probably be used against him when he was brought to trial. This fact should be kept in mind as we examine his opinions.

This study, then, of the dates of his pacifist utterances and the attempt to correlate these writings with definite periods of his life have yielded at least two positive results. It has been shown that he must have held his pacifist views for some time previous to 1377, for if he had first acquired those opinions in that year, they would surely have

(15). Ibid, Pages 411ff.

undergone many changes during the seven following years of change and upheaval. In the second place, the fact that many of his boldest denunciations of the whole war system and of crusades in particular were made when he himself was in personal danger, would prove that his convictions were not simply expressed in the piping times of peace, when it is always easy to find many bold people, but that he was willing to defend them with his life if necessary.

A further conclusion may be drawn from this comparative study of his writings. His English works, which were largely composed in the last two years of his life, and which were addressed to the common people, are fully as outspoken on the question of war as any of his Latin works. Indeed they not only have all the ideas of the Latin works, but they often express them with more vigor, as will be clearly seen in the ensuing pages. The significant thing to note in this connection is that Wyclif's pacifism was not in any sense what we are pleased today to call "parlor Bolshevism." It was not merely with his educated associates and his Oxford friends and readers that he was willing to give voice to his extreme opinions. He proclaimed them to his audiences everywhere, and to the rather large group of ordinary people who came in contact with his English writings. His was in no sense an intellectual radicalism, that had never felt the chill breeze of actual life.

III

His Pacifist Philosophy

Wyclif was a prolific writer. Almost all of his works which have been saved from the destructive tooth of time have now been collected and edited. His Latin works, which the Wyclif Society has been most faithful in publishing, fill a large shelf. There are thirty-four volumes, on subjects which include philosophy, logic, political science and theology, with four volumes of Latin sermons for good measure. They bear the impress of much learning. Their heavy, involved sentences of typical medieval Latin, roll forth with the gravity worthy of a learned doctor of scholastic philosophy. At times the thought creaks and groans under the load of intricate logic and farfetched digressions which it is made to bear. Yet these volumes are a treasury of the ideas and opinions of Wyclif, even if they hardly give a complete picture of his personality.

His English works were either much less voluminous or more of them have been lost. At any rate four or five good sized volumes would be filled from the documents we possess. They are mostly sermons, short religious tracts, and some biblical exegesis, written in a more popular style, for a more ignorant audience. In these works the veil is removed from

his face and we see the man clearly. Sharp flashes of wit, biting sarcasm, spicy bits of humor enliven and humanize the work. His vigorous spirit leaps out in startling phrases and picturesque exclamations. Praise and approbation are expressed simply and sincerely, and condemnation is swift and terrible. The quaint but rugged English of the period seems to be a perfect medium for his spirit. In the quotations which follow, therefore, the translations from the Latin are often very valuable in giving his ideas, but the paragraphs from his English works show the man himself.

In spite of his many works on such a variety of subjects, Wyclif never wrote a book on war, nor on non-resistance. His pacifist ideas are not found in any one place, nor are they logically arranged. It may, indeed, at first glance seem presumptuous to attempt to give in fairly logical order his philosophy regarding the question of war. It is however more feasible than it seems. There are in his Latin works alone nearly twenty-five places comprising over seventy-five pages, where he gives a more or less complete exposition of different aspects of his view on war. In his English works, where the statement of his views is always more brief, there are nearly twenty references making up about thirty pages. Besides these longer declarations, there are many paragraphs both in his English and Latin works in which he indicates his spirit and attitude, although he does not give a definitive expression to

his views. The occurrence of such ideas in so many of his works shows at least that his opinions were not simply a passing fancy, which he later repudiated. They were settled convictions of his life. And the fact that these opinions were expressed in sermons, and tracts, and works on politics and government, shows that they must have been deep convictions to which he could not help giving utterance, even though there was in a great many cases no particular reason for expressing those views. Had he written a book on war, we would expect him to express his opinions on the subject, but when those ideas crop out in the most unexpected places in his writings on other subjects, we know his views of nonresistance were vital and real.

There are three places in the works of Wyclif in which he gives an extended expression of his pacifism. In his work "De Civili Dominio" he devotes more than forty pages to a discussion of war in its various aspects, and in the volume "De Officio Regis" he gives another chapter to the question, covering about twenty pages. In an English tract on "The Seven Deadly Sins," he makes a short but very pithy statement of his views in the section on the sin of Anger. The other comments which he makes are all of the nature of digressions, more or less, during the discussion of some other topic.

As we examine these works we shall find that the

arguments in favor of war were not a great deal different in Wyclif's day from those in our own time. Expressed more crudely, perhaps, and with a strong medieval flavor in their curious reasoning, they are nevertheless recognizable, many of them, as the same arguments which we meet today. Wyclif hesitated not at all in answering them, and although his own reasoning is often a bit quaint and hardly acceptable to a modern mind, there is a great deal of strength and profound thinking in what he says.

The proposition that an aggressive war was the best self-defence was old in Wyclif's time. Wyclif states both the argument and its refutation in his English and in his Latin works. The contrast between the two is sufficiently interesting to warrant quoting from both sources. No better example could be found of the general difference between John Wyclif, learned philosopher and John Wyclif, popular preacher. In the Latin he says "It is argued that it is known from the beginning that to repel force by force is lawful, just as serpents, and other unreasoning animals attack men when from some cause or other men attempt to kill them. But our active enemies do us secretly great injuries, and in case we do not crush them, they will do us intolerable harm, by destroying the English church. Therefore by the law of nature it is expedient for the greater good for our people to attack their enemies first." And he

cannot refrain from adding "Here I say that this blasphemous argument is not heard from a follower of the humble patience of Jesus Christ." (16) His English writings state it thus: "Bot yitte argues Anticrist, to mayntene mennis feghting, that kynde [nature] techis that men schulden by strenght ageynstonde hor enmyes. Sith a nedder [adder] by hir kynde stynges a mon that tredes on her, why schulde we not feght ageynes oure enmyes? for elles thei wolden destrye us, and dampne hor owne soules. And thus for luf we chastisen hom, as Gods lawe techis us. And so, sith oure enmyes wolden assayle us, but if [unless] we sayliden hom byfore, sith we loven better oureself, we schulden first assayle hom, and thus we shal haf pees." (17)

Wyclif's answer to this is naive, yet it shows a deep spiritual insight. Angels, he says, withstand fiends, and men through the law are able to resist their enemies without fighting or killing. Wise men of the world "holden hor strenghtes, and thus vencuschen [vanquish] hor enmyes withouten any strok; and men of the gospel vencuschen by pacience, and comen to reste and to pees by suffryng of deth. .... Bot tho fende takes ensaumple at wormes of venyme, and by a naked propurte teches men to feght; but mony other ensaumples of pacience of bestis teche us to suffre, for myche more gode." The immediate outcry at his method of resistance, in that day

(16) Wyclif, Opera Minora, Page 124.
(17) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 137.

as in this, is, "Bot peraventure mony men schulden lese hor worldly richessis !" And Wyclif answers with a fine scorn, "Bot what harm were thereof?" (18)

Another argument which was used by the friars in favor of war, and which has a rather familiar ring, was that justice is surely sacred, and should be defended to the death. War therefore, which is fought to maintain justice, is perfectly justifiable. Wyclif goes straight to the root of the question. When we come to seize temporal goods for our own enrichment, he says, we are not, can not, be certain as to what is justice. But patience we are sure is right. It is the very first condition of love which the apostle gives in I Corinthians 13. Christ also bids us to suffer patiently, and if anyone takes our coat to let him have the cloak also. (19)

But the friars put forth a stronger argument. Surely men ought to love the poor, and a war in defense of the poor people of a country, in order to protect them from oppression, is amply justified. But Wyclif clings to his belief in the value and great power of patient suffering. Christ, he replies, with all knowledge and power, allowed himself to be crucified, and we surely are no better. In case of a war, both rulers and people, both rich and poor, should be willing to suffer, knowing that God will defend them. (20)

(18) Ibid, Page 140.
(19) Johannis Wyclif, Sermones, Edited by Johann Loserth (London, 1890) IV, Page 35.
(20) Ibid, Page 35.

Certainly, however, we should fight to restrain the wickedness of our enemies, the friars maintain. To this argument, which, stated in a slightly different form, was much in vogue in 1917, Wyclif answers with a profound vision. Thus to act, he says, is to take upon man what rightly belongs to God alone, expecting that "from this rash evil-doing good will come." But good results do not spring from such a source. Furthermore, Christ rebuked Peter for using the sword, and this shows that his followers are not to fight. In another instance also (Luke 9:54-56) he absolutely refused to take vengeance on the Samaritans, saying that "the son of man came not to lose souls but to save." All three of these arguments of the friars Wyclif says are "devilish excuses" (luciferinas excusaciones). (21)

An example of the reformer at his vigorous best is shown in his retort to the old, old argument that war brings to men glory and honor, and cultivates the manly virtues. Such an argument stirs him to the very depths. "Lord!" he cries, "what honour falles to a knyght, for he killes mony men? Wil I wot that honge-men killen many moo, and by more just titel and so by vertue, and so schulden thei be preysid more then soche knyghtis." And the "bochere of bestis" kills more often than either, and with the best excuse, so that he should have the highest praise of all. He closes this sarcastic attack by saying, "So Gods lawe techis men to come bifore in dedes of

(21) Ibid, Page 36.

charite and werkes of werschip; bot I rede not in Gods lawe that Cristen men schulden cum byfore in feghting or batel, bot in meke pacience. And this were the mene whereby we schulden have Gods pees." (22)

His view of war was not superficial, nor merely that of a gentle man to whom fighting was distasteful. He mourned the folly of war as a terrible loss of money and labor which might have been expended toward much better ends. He also realized very well the underlying cause of war. He realized that it was not so much pugnacity as cupidity that was the root of war. In arguing that the clergy should be deprived of property he emphasizes the fact that the root of all evil is cupidity, and that war and law-suits spring from this same spurce. (23) In several places he gives brief exhortations against the causes of war. "Put away therefore the inordinate love of wealth and of honor and of secular dominion and it will not be necessary to make war. It is indeed an evil progeny that comes from such a mother." (24) "Whence put away proud desire and the lust for honor and land and wealth, and the art of making war is done away with." (25) There were at that time no great imperialistic schemes; there was no "Weltpolitik" which included the world in

(22) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 141.
(23) Wyclif, Opera Minora, Page 69. From the tract "De Paupertate Christi."
(24) Wyclif, De Officio Regis, Page 266.
(25) Ibid, Page 271.

its aggrandizing schemes, but the causes of war were nevertheless largely economic, and Wyclif's clear vision had detected that fact.

Besides these general arguments for war which Wyclif answered, there were many which were used particularly by the clergy, based on biblical and ecclesiastical grounds. Many of them are very medieval in their appeal to a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible. It was thought worth while, for instance, to argue that since in Deuteronomy Jehovah is reported as saying "I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal," therefore it was justifiable for believers in the Bible to make war. Wyclif makes short work of such reasoning. It is obvious from the context that the right of thus killing and wounding is reserved to Jehovah, and it has therefore no bearing on the subject. He tersely points out this simple fact. (26).

Another justification, this time an appeal to precedent, was often made. Abraham, David, and many other of the Old Testament heroes, often made war on the infidels. Furthermore, the Maccabees, who were priests, were famous fighters, and the medieval chronicles were full of the tales of earlier popes and bishops who were as war-like as the kings and princes. Wyclif's answer to the first portion of the argument is guarded. He could hardly cast reflections on any portion of the Bible, so he admits that "it is conceded with sufficient and full evidence

(26) Wyclif, Sermones, IV, Page 195.

that it happened that it was permitted to the Old Testament fathers to wage war, but to make war, lacking justifying reasons, as war is commonly waged, is evil." (27) With the Maccabees, he is more severe. We are not trying to imitate the Maccabees, he points out; we are to imitate Christ. And Christ's priesthood is one of humility and patience. The old warlike law is superseded in him. When it comes to warlike ecclesiastics his tone is even sharper. If popes and bishops fought, so much the worse for them. They did wickedly. (28)

Stronger and more difficult to meet were the arguments which were derived from the life and sayings of Jesus. It is here, also that Wyclif shows himself at his best in refutation. He refused to be drawn into a war of texts, but argued from the spirit behind the texts. It was often brought forward, for instance, that Peter used his sword on the night of the betrayal. Jesus rebuked him, it was contended, only because it was necessary that the Son of Man should be delivered up to his enemies. Wyclif answers from the general teachings of Christ, saying that since Jesus laid down the great principle that he who smiteth with the sword shall perish by the sword, "it is knowun thing that Petre synnede in this fightynge; and mychе more schulden prestis fight not for a cause of lasse value." (29)

When it was pointed out that in Luke Jesus commanded his disciples to sell their coats and buy swords, Wyclif had

(27) Wyclif, Opera Minora. Page 123.
(28) Wyclif, Sermones, IV, Page 196.
(29) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 123.

several answers, some very medieval, some very modern in their tone. He shows that Jesus added that two swords were enough, and cleverly adduces the argument that by the two swords Christ meant the sword of the Holy Spirit and the sword of man's tongue. All of which is worthy of a scholastic logician. But he has much in common with the most modern criticism when he says that if Christ meant for the apostles to buy real swords, he must have meant that they should use them to fight with, not "for kervynge of mete or scredynge [chopping] of trees." And since they did not buy swords and fight, common sense indicates that they could not have understood that he wished them to buy real swords and fight. (30)

The "fend", however, as Wyclif picturesquely calls him, brings up a last argument for his side of the case in maintaining that the pope approves crusading, and openly urges it. Men should certainly believe him. Any answer to this argument would involve an opinion very close to heresy, even in that day, but Wyclif did not hesitate to follow his convictions and state them boldly. Peter sinned, and those who have followed him in the papal chair have sinned. If it were not for the fact that the pope must maintain his temporal power he would not urge men to fight. Such action in the pope is particularly detestable,"ffor if men-sleeyng in seculeres be odiouse to God,mychе more in prestis that schulden be Cristis

(30). Select Works, Arnold, II, Page 43; III, Page 259; III, Page 264.

vikers." (31) It is hard for us in these days of comparative freedom in religious thinking to realize the courage and boldness necessary to make such a statement and to be willing to abide by all its consequences. It is another interesting bit of evidence as to the depth and strength of Wyclif's anti-war opinions, that he dared to denounce the head of all Christendom.

With this Oxford reformer, as with most of those who have held similar opinions, these well-turned refutations of the arguments for the rightness or necessity of war were not what decided his individual attitude on the question. It takes more than a debate on the good and evil aspects of war to settle a man's own personal course of action in regard to war. Usually the roots of such action lie deep in a man's religion, or in the moral principles in which he believes.

It is probably already clear from Wyclif's general arguments that the criterion by which he judged the question of war was the teaching and spirit of Jesus. This was also the criterion which he used in determining his individual attitude toward war. But there were other factors which influenced his decision - deep seated personal emotions, and rational arguments which were derived from other sources than the Gospel - as will be clear from the paragraphs which follow.

As far as we can judge from treatises written after

(31) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 141.

his own decision had been made, Wyclif seems to have based his own personal attitude toward war on a deep conviction of the utter folly and evil of taking human life. It crops out again and again in his works, though nowhere, perhaps, does he state it more clearly and tersely than in a "Treatise on the Commandments," where he says, "Therefore let each man beware of malicious bodily manslaying, that no man by deed nor by will, nor by procuring others, for hate nor for dread, assent to this sin." (32) A man who could say that, especially the phrase, "for hate nor for dread," could hardly be expected to be other than a pacifist, if the statement was made sincerely. And in a vigorous argument in one of his Latin works, he holds that vengeance is permitted to God, but that for us "neither in revelation, nor in the scriptural faith nor by the infallible law is it permitted to fight for temporal wealth, nor to fight to the length of killing one's neighbor." (33)

There is a long rambling argument in his De Officio Regis which he prefaces thus: "Whence I will proceed in three ways against making war in Christendom; first by way of the law of nature, second by way of the law of scripture, and third by way of human reason." (34) In the second portion he deals with the example of Christ as a proof that Christians should not make war. (35) It is fully as interesting for its weakness as

(32) Writings of the Reverend and Learned John Wycliff, D.D., edited by the Religious Tract Society (London, 1831), Page 74.
(33) Wyclif, De Officio Regis, Page 263.
(34) Ibid, Page 262.
(35) Ibid, Pages 266 - 269.

for its strength, for we are not to suppose that John of Wyclif was a modern Biblical critic, nor was he developed among modern influences. But we can see the germ of the modern attitude breaking through here and there out of an ingenious but quite ante-modern scholasticism.

He begins his exposition tediously by using various texts to prove that Jesus was opposed to war. In the first place, Jesus chose to be born in a peaceful era of the Roman Empire. Then he uses the angel's song "Peace on earth" to further advance his argument. He points out the beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers," but he allows more space to a dissertation on the text "My peace I give unto you" and next uses the fact that after Jesus' resurrection his words to the disciples were "Peace be with you." Furthermore, he instructed his disciples to say, "In whatsoever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house'." Having expounded each of these texts in the most approved scholastic fashion, he lays aside his dialectics, and puts, not his learning, but himself, into the argument.

Vengeance, he asserts, belongs to God alone, and those who seek to take vengeance by the sword, are going directly contrary to the teaching of Christ. It is for us to obey Christ's command and "turn the other cheek." There is no principle in which he believed more firmly, and he shows the

advisability of losing all one's material wealth, rather than losing one's life and one's soul by taking part in what is clearly against the teachings of the Master. Christ demanded that a man hate father, and mother, and all his possessions, in order to be his disciple. How then can a man be a disciple who is willing to kill Christ in himself, for the sake of temporal wealth? It is here that he inserts his statement - "Put away therefore the inordinate love of wealth and of honor and secular dominion, and it will not be necessary to make war."

Furthermore, he adds, Christ had a much better way of dealing with our enemies. His method was that we should forgive our enemy until seventy times seven. And even with those who were still unrepentant, what was his method? Merely to treat them as publicans and sinners. But "How may it be lawful to make war on even a publican or sinner?" Undoubtedly the recommendation of such a course in Wyclif's day was considered as impractical as it would be today, but to him who believes that forgiveness is idealistic, and that "if he were thus pacient his enemyes wolde kille hym," (36) Wyclif always replies that such fear is due primarily to a belief that the devil is stronger than Christ, and that the principles of the devil will conquer the principles of Christ's teachings.

It would seem, from the quotations which have preceded, that Wyclif could hardly advocate that a Christian should take

(36) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 138.

part in any war, but in several places he sets down the conditions for a Christian war. This seems paradoxical and inconsistent, until we examine his conditions, when we find that he is consistent.

First of all, he says, it is lawful to fight God's enemies. But the second condition seems practically to veto the first. It is only lawful to fight when one has the direct authority of God. God must speak to a man, as he did to the Old Testament leaders, telling him to fight, and whom to fight, before he can consider that he has authority to fight. In the third place, lest any might feel that the two conditions were not impossible of attainment, he adds that no one should wage war unless he does his fighting with a heart full of love for God, for his neighbor, and even for his enemy. He expresses doubt as to whether it is possible to make war in love, "ffor hit semes no charite to ride ageyne thin enemye wil armed with a sharpe spere, upon a strong courser." (37)

As to the reason for Wyclif's laying down these conditions of lawful war, one may only conjecture. They seem so obviously impossible that one is almost inclined to charge him with writing them as a witty piece of sarcasm, were it not for the fact that he also uses much the same argument in one of his Latin works, saying "I have often said that it is permissible

(37) Ibid, Pages 136 - 141.

to fight and war because of having love for God and also for the neighbor being attacked, and otherwise it is not permissible." (38) But even if these conditions were laid down sincerely, he at any rate realized perfectly the impossibility of their fulfilment. He goes on to say of the three conditions, "And sith no man shulde feght bot with these thre maners, hit is knowen thing that men shulden not now feght. And herfore Jesus Christ, duke of our batel, taght us lawe of pacience and not to feght bodily. . . . . If God rowne [whisper] in thin eere, and bid the feght in his cause, . . feght fast in Gods cause as he hymself biddes the, and elles holde thi pees, as Crist did with his clerkes." (39)

Perhaps nowhere does Wyclif sum up more clearly and more forcefully what he believed to be the Christian attitude toward war, than he does in a short treatise, "De Fide Catholica," (40) in which he contrasts war and love. He begins "Now since the 16 conditions of love, as it is clear in the scriptures, teach what things are done lawfully, and what are heretical against Christ, therefore it is proven from them that wars which are commonly made are blasphemy, falsifying the faith, and that it is unlawful to war except out of love which the one making war has towards the enemy, for it ought to be known to the faithful that every one ought to love his enemy

(38) Wyclif, De Officio Regis, Page 261.
(39) Select Works. Arnold, III, Page 137.
(40) Wyclif, Opera Minora, Pages 119ff.

also, and that everything should be done in love."

Having given this preface, he takes up the attributes of love, one by one, as they are given in the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians, and contrasts them with the attributes of war. Some of them are particularly striking. "Love is peaceful, not returning evil for evil, nor curse for curse, but on the contrary blesses." Briefly he points out how notoriously warriors contradict this. "Love is kind". But it is clear that the Holy Spirit is utterly extinct in these wars, for men ~~they~~ try to kill their enemies by any sort of shrewd plot. Furthermore the friars consent to all these things, either "by coloring them through their sophisms, or by keeping silent." "Love seeks not its own." But how can it be said that warriors out of love seek money and honor for themselves? "Love thinks not evil." "But the whole study of these wars is this - that they scheme by day and by night, by thinking and by willing, in order to confound their neighbors, their enemies." After running through the sixteen attributes of love in this way, he ends by saying that this war which the friars are urging is a "damnable sin."

While it is doubtless difficult to give a complete idea of a man's opinions by merely citing brief excerpts from his works, yet enough quotations have been given to sketch in Wyclif's fundamental arguments against war as an unchristian

thing, and also his individual attitude as a Christian toward war. Through all of his thinking two main principles seem to stand out, two convictions which were extremely vital to him. The first is an idealistic faith, if you will, in the power of love to conquer force. Not being troubled by the discoveries of modern science, he even interpreted nature as being a proof and an example of a world dominated by love. He starts out in the good medieval way by taking a text from Ecclesiastes which says that the animals love their own kind. From this he points out that with animals it is always so - wolf loves wolf, and serpent loves serpent, while "man, on the contrary loves the bird and the horse and the dog but treats his brother cruelly." He closes the rather rambling argument with this sentence: "And briefly, all created nature is a natural book, telling us how according to the Christian religion we ought to love our God and our brother." (41)

For this practical idealist love was the only method of defeating one's enemies. In speaking of the verse in Psalms, "Cease from evil and do good, seek peace and follow after it," he says that to seek peace is easy, but perfectly to follow after it is very difficult. For we must follow after peace in the way that Christ taught. "He however teaches by faith to return good for evil, and to love our enemies." (42)

(41) Wyclif, De Officio Regis, Pages 262 - 263.
(42) Wyclif, Opera Minora, Page 80. From the tract "Speculum Secularium Dominorum."

Any method of seeking peace contrary to love - such as victory over one's enemies, or oppression of those who are weaker - cannot be called a Christian method of seeking peace.

He saw clearly that in spite of its seeming slowness, the method of returning good for evil was in reality far swifter in attaining results, than the usual method of retaliation. In a sermon he contrasts Christ's method of winning peace by meekness and patience, with the devil's method of retaliation and revenge. "And certis," he concludes, "Crists meene is more light, more short, and more siker, for fendis contynuen werre, and maken fals pees to more werre." (43) It is nearly six hundred years since this Yorkshire prophet wrote these words, yet "fendis" in various guises, still "maken fals pees to more werre." and Wyclif's ideas are still ahead of our time.

The second thread of conviction running through all of his ideas on war is his belief in the power of suffering to accomplish good. It is always patience and suffering which he lauds as the means of defeating the enemy through the power of God. The vicarious suffering of Christ on the cross had caught his imagination and he had thought and believed deeply in that great fundamental human force. "The passion of Christ," he says, "is myche for to preyse, bot the sleeyng of his

(43) Select Works, Arnold, II, Page 41.

tormentoures is odiouse to God. Lord, sith kynge of al this world preyses so myche passion, and hatis such accioun, why schulde not men do so." (44) He saw clearly what great nations today are only beginning to admit, the utter futility and blindness of revenge. Here is a paragraph from a sermon, preached possibly to his Lutterworth parishioners, which well states his view. His hearers may have taken it to themselves personally, but Wyclif also believed in its principle as a rule for nations. "This reule that Poul gyveth is bothe light and reasonable. For it is more light to men to forgyve yvel than to take veniaunce; and it is more reasonable, for more good cometh to men therfore. And bi this reule that Poul gyveth here batailes and stryvyngis in plee shulden be forsaken of Cristene men as Goddis lawe tellith here. . . . But certis custum and mannis lawe ben ful ferre fro this lore. So it is that many have of her owne synne myche malis, and thes wolen fighte with men and slee hem. But kepe thou pacience and mekenesse and than ther yvel turneth thee to good by the vertue of Goddis lawe." (45)

Such was the philosophy of "non-violent coercion" or pacifism which John Wyclif developed in the fourteenth century, not in conjunction with any "radical" group, nor inspired by any heretical sect. It is quite permissible to say that it was

(44) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 139.
(45) Select Works, Arnold, II, Pages 250 - 251.

strictly his own philosophy. Yet the reader must have noted already how very similar were his ideas to those of certain groups today. Strip his sentences of their medieval language, and their medieval quirks of thought, and one might well wonder whether these opinions were written in the twentieth century rather tham in the fourteenth. This will perhaps be made clearer if some of the principal ideas which have been covered in the last few pages be drawn out and stated in modern language. It can then be seen how very little his opinions differ from those of modern Christian pacifists. With regard to war in general these are some of his sentiments:

> The best defense is not a military offense, but a resistance of love and patience and suffering to force.
>
> War cannot be just if it involves our own financial gain. We are not capable of discerning justice when we are one of the interested parties.
>
> War to restrain the evil designs of our enemies is based on the theory that "two wrongs make a right."
>
> The virtues of which war is the mother are the virtues of the hangman.
>
> Nothing can be found in the life or teachings of Jesus which will justify war.

> The fact that the Church gives its approval to war does not justify war. It simply condemns the Church.

In regard to the more personal attitude toward war and one's individual course of action, he sets down these principles:

> It is wrong to kill, either through hate or fear.
>
> It is better to lose all things than to deny in one's life Jesus' principle of love.
>
> To deny that love and patience are more powerful than force is to admit that Christianity is impracticable - that force is stronger than love, evil stronger than good.
>
> Theoretically, a Christian war is possible, but actually, war cannot be reconciled with love.
>
> Love cannot be the motive of war. War is the absolute antithesis of love.

As an extremely interesting parallel to these statements note this paragraph. "The unity of mankind in a great world brotherhood, with a common Father; the inestimable value of even the least of the children of men; the duty of love, even to one's enemies; the avoidance of vengeance and retaliation in the face of any provocation, as the substitute for the old law of an eye for an eye; the duty of unending forgiveness, even as often as seventy times seven; the persuasive power

of sacrifice - can these be reconciled with the method of war?" (46) This was written and published in 1923 by one of a group of so-called "radical" writers - one of the most modern of moderns, yet most of his ideas on war are anticipated by Wyclif by five hundred and fifty years. It is of very considerable importance in our judgement of Wyclif that we take into account the fact that Christian pacifists of to-day have been able to add scarcely anything to the fundamental ideas which he largely wrought out for himself and stated so boldly to the men of his own time, both to his learned contemporaries, and to the common people of England. To some Wyclif's philosophy of Christian pacifism may be a further proof of his greatness; to others it may be the proof of a mind too idealistic to be of great practical worth. It is at any rate a clear demonstration of his capacity for reaching modern conclusions.

(46) Kirby Page, War, its Causes, Consequences, and Cure, (New York, 1923), Page 77.

IV

His Pacifism in Action

To talk of pacifism in action may seem to be a contradiction in terms, but as it was explained in the introduction of this paper, pacifism is not necessarily "passive-ism." Certainly there is no other way to describe the very vigorous method in which Wyclif directed his anti-war philosophy against the militant tendencies of the church of his day.

At no time was the medieval Church entirely averse to using, or at least sanctioning military methods in order to gain power or wealth for itself, but in the period in which Wyclif lived, its militaristic and imperialistic tendencies showed themselves in the clearest light. The so-called "Babylonian Captivity" of the Church - the residence of the Popes at Avignon - had terminated in 1376 by the return of Gregory to Rome. But upon his death an even more disgraceful situation arose. In 1378, due to a split among the cardinals, two Popes were elected, one by the French group, maintaining his court at Avignon, and one by the Roman cardinals, with his headquarters at Rome. This Great Schism, as historians have called it, did not confine itself merely to mutual

recriminations and slander. It also called into play the military arm, and the governments of all Europe lined up with one faction or the other. In England very vigorous measures were taken. Bishop Spencer, who had been much noted for his cruelty in putting down the Revolt of the Peasants, was given charge of organizing a "Holy Crusade" against the French Clementists. It was inspired by the Roman Pope, Urban, and was organized with the aid of the friars. When the crusade was at length gotten togéther at considerable sacrifice and much exhortation and indulgence-selling it was landed at Calais. But the redoubtable Bishop Spencer decided that the lands of Flanders were more fruitful and easier to conquer, so the marauding band was turned against the innocent Flemish, and was fairly successful in its very cruel invasion, until at length halted by French troups. Thus we have the enlightening spectacle of a Christian crusade sent by the Roman faction against the French faction, turned against the people of Flanders, who were also Roman in their sympathies, and only stopped by the interference of the French faction. (47) This is, in brief, a part of the background for Wyclif's attack on priestly militarism. Is it any wonder that at times his comments lose their value for the historian, by becoming no longer opinions and thoughts, but mere expletive and invective?

(47) George Macaulay Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe, (London, 1904), Page 268.

The sight of popes - spiritual rulers - Christ's representatives on earth - organizing and urging the most detestable military campaigns, stirred the reformer to strong language. Pope or no Pope, he could not refrain from denouncing in the most uncomprising terms, such unchristlike sins. He bursts out in one of his sermons: "Lord, where this Pope Urbane hadde Goddis charite dwelling in him, when he stirred men to fighte and slee many thousand men, to venge him on the tother pope, and of men that holden with him!" (48). In his various tracts, also, he often comments on this papal schism. "For this were a fendis cause, to fighte and prove this to be Cristis viker; sith Crist wold not that men foughten for him; and who woot whether this be a fend?" (49). It was particularly detestable, he thought, to grant pardons and indulgences to those fighting. "Whi wole not the proud prest of Rome graunt ful perdon to alle men for to lyve in pees and charite and pacience as he doth to alle men for to fighte and slee Cristene men and to help therto." (50). His Latin works as well as his English are full of invective against the crusade, but his spirit is so much more clearly given in the English, that it would be needless repetition to give quotations from the Latin. In writing to his Archbisop in denunciation of the crusade, he makes his premise that only those works can be approved by the

(48) Select Works, Arnold, II, Page 319.
(49) Ibid, Page 404.
(50) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 330. "The Grete Sentence of Curs Expounded."

Master, which are done in love. "But it is probable," he continues, "that neither this killing of the people nor the impoverishment of the land proceeded from the love of the Lord Jesus Christ." (51)

It was not only the pope whom he regarded as the guilty one. All through the rank and file of priests and bishops, he denounces the same spirit. "Lord what charite is it for hem that schulden be most gostly [spiritual] prestis to make werre in alle Cristendom for here worldly cause and stynkynge lordischipe, agenst Cristis biddyng and lif, and graunte ful absolucion and relessyng of alle peynes in purgatory, for to slee eche Cristene man the other, as don thes proud prestis of Rome and Avynoun, with here worldly clerkis on bothe sidis. Certis thei disturblen verry pees of al holy Chirche and alle Cristendom therto. Lord! what mirrour of mekeness is this that bischopis and prestis, monkis, chanons and freris that schulden be meke and pacient and lambren among wolvys bi techyng of Crist, ben more proudly arraied in armer and other coatis of werris, and more cruel in here owen cause than any

(51) Lechler, Page 414. (In reading these vehement outbursts against the crusade, it should be remembered that they were written at a time when several of his friends and followers were being excommunicated, and that his own turn seemed only a matter of months. It seems astoundingly courageous for a man of sixty-two to denounce in such swift and terrible language the pope himself and all those of his hierarchy who favored this unchristian expedition. Even the boldest men are usually frightened at the expectation of a heresy trial, though they may not renounce their opinions. But Wyclif seems to show no fear whatsoever.)

other lord or tiraunt, ye, hethene emperours. . . . Lord! what ensaumple of pacience geven thes worldly prestis and religiouse, that schulden geve alle here goodis and here bodily lif to keep other men in pees and in charite, as Crist and his lawe techen, and now pursuen men so cruely." (52)

It was due, he felt, to the mistaken coloring that the priests gave to war, that men were willing to fight. Like many today who paint the glory and brilliance of war, so in Wyclif's day the priests "techen synful men to bie helle ful dere. . . for thei techen Cristen men to suffre moche cold and hungur and thrist and moche wakynge and dispisynge and betynge for to get worldly honor and a litel drit [filth] bi fals werrynge," but they do not teach men how to live in love. He points out that if the Church leaders were truly anxious for peace, they would gladly give up their temporal power in order to bring it about. But instead of that they "blaberen forth anticristis bullis to maken Cristene men to werre eche with othere in hope to wynne hevene bi siche werris." (53) Especially did it arouse the ire of this straight forward philosopher-reformer that prelates should force the priests to be ready and armed at all times, and even constrain them to fight. "Goddis curs renneth many thousand tyme with al this." (54)

(52) Select Works, Arnold, III, Page 295.
(53) The English Works of Wyclif, Edited by F. D. Matthew (London 1880), Page 147.
(54) Ibid, Page 91.

During the latter part of his life, Wyclif was a particularly vehement foe of the various mendicant orders, and it is quite natural that a man who had dared to denounce in the strongest terms the head of all Christendom, would not mince words in speaking about the friars. Sermons, treatises and books - in English and Latin - are full of virulent philippics against the orders, and many of these outbursts are directed against their militaristic tendencies. There is an element of sameness in these attacks, and also a very strong tendency toward exaggeration, which make them less valuable for our purpose. There are scathing attacks leveled at their propensities for stirring up men for the crusades and for other wars also. There are frequent denunciations of their laxness in preaching a gospel of love, and their eagerness in inciting men to war. "Thes seien not, Pees to this house, what toun or cuntre thei dwellen inne, but shapen to hem axis of werre; and this shewith no pees, but hate of Crist." (55)

Wyclif attacked the Church on many other grounds. His comments on the pronounced military tendencies of the organization form but a very small portion of the written flood which he poured out against it in the last years of his life, but a brief sketch of that particular angle of the attack has been given for the purpose of showing that his pacifism was

(55) Select Works, Arnold, II, Page 212.

not merely theoretical. His was no closet philosophy, arriving at radical conclusions, unaffected by, and without any effect upon, the everyday world. It was rather a series of convictions arising out of a very busy and a normal life, with a wide experience.

V

The Silence of his Biographers

If it be considered remarkable that Wyclif in the fourteenth century should be expounding a very complete philosophy of Christian pacifism, it is a fact nearly as surprising that his biographers have so consistantly failed to note it. The writer has had access to nearly every standard biography of Wyclif, and many less pretentious works concerning the reformer, yet only one writer has mentioned the fact that he held any unusual opinions concerning the question of war. It will be worth while to take up the main volumes which might have told of his "radical" views, but which for pne reason or another, are silent.

One of the first, and still one of the most valuable biographies of Wyclif is that of John Lewis, published in 1720. (56) It is filled with quotations and excerpts from his writings, and devotes one long chapter to a complete review of all Wyclif's ideas, quoting extensively. This summary, however proves to be entirely of theological ideas, and neither there, nor elsewhere in the book do we obtain even a hint that Wyclif was opposed to war. It is however, excusable in this biography for the avowed purpose is to vindicate Wyclif's life and theology which had been attacked by "Popish" writers.

(56) John Lewis, History of the Life and Sufferings of the Reverend and Learned John Wiclif, D.D. (Oxford reprint, 1820).

It is in a two-volume life of Wyclif written in 1831 by Dr. Vaughan that we discover a reference to Wyclif's pacifism. (57) In speaking of the tract on the "Seven Deadly Sins" Dr. Vaughan says that "the reformer adverts to the crusade against the antipope and delivers some novel sentiments on the practice of war." Then he proceeds to give two pages to Wyclif's views on war in general and a few quotations regarding crusades. Although brief and incomplete, the quotations which he gives from Wyclif's English works are sufficient to indicate that the reformer was an uncompromising pacifist. He adds: "It is also evident, that he was aware of the opposition and contempt which the advocates of such opinions must encounter, so long as the state of the world should continue to be at all such as it had hitherto been. But the New Testament was before him, and that volume was understood as requiring that each professor of the gospel should adhere to such methods of resistance only as are there prescribed, or as occur in the recorded example of Christ and of his apostles." (58)

In the year 1884, which was the five-hundredth anniversary of Wyclif's death, there were several books and biographies published concerning him. Dr. Loserth, a distinguished Wyclif scholar, published a book on "Wyclif and Hus," translated by M. J. Evans. (59) Since it is largely

(57) Robert Vaughan, The Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe, D.D. (London, 1831), Pages 209ff.
(58) Lewis, Wiclif, Page 213.
(59) Johann Loserth, Wiclif and Hus, translated by Rev. M. J. Evans, (London, 1884).

concerned with the works of Hus, and Wyclif is brought in only as an influence and factor in his life, it is not surprising that we find in it no mention of Wyclif's opposition to war. In the same year, Prof. Montagu Burrows published three lectures on Wyclif under the name of "Wiclif's Place in History." (60) It is a suggestive little book, but its author gives us no hint of the reformer's pacifism. A third book of the same year is a biography by Canon Pennington. (61) It aims to be complete, but is as silent as the others concerning Wyclif's "novel sentiments" on war.

A very brief booklet on the "Life of John Wycliffe," by F. D. Matthew, (62) published about this time, covers very well practically every other phase of his life, but fails to point out that the reformer was against crusades, much less that he was against all wars. This in spite of the fact that Dr. Matthew is most learned, has published a valuable volume of Wyclif's English works, and must be very familiar with his opinions.

When we come to a book entitled "Wycliffe and Movements for Reform" brought out in 1890 by Reginald Lane Poole, (63) we look eagerly to find some new light on the subject, both because of the title and because of the author. But the book proves to be largely an exposition of the reformer's theory of "Dominion" and contains not a whisper of any opinions on war.

(60) Montagu Burrows, Wiclif's Place in History, (London,1884).
(61) Arthur Robert Pennington,M.A. John Wiclif: His Life, Times, and Teaching, (London,1884).
(62) Frederic D. Matthew, Life of John Wycliffe, (London,no date).
(63) Reginald Lane Poole, Wycliffe and Movements for Reform, (New York,1890).

In a biography by Lewis Sergeant, written in 1893 we find the same silence. (64)

But more disappointing than any of these is the very splendid and very scholarly work, "John Wycliffe and his English Precursors," by the noted German scholar, Professor Lechler, translated into English by Dr. Peter Lorimer in 1884. This is by far the most exhaustive biography we have. It deals very minutely with every problem and event of Wyclif's life, and takes up his opinions and ideas in great detail. Prof. Lechler was perfectly familiar with the manuscripts of all the Latin works, then unpublished, as well as with the English works of the reformer. He gives a very long exposition of"Wyclif's Theology and Philosophy" - yet in the whole thick volume there is only one sentence which gives even the slightest suggestion as to his views on war. In speaking of Wyclif's "Cruciata" he describes it as a pamphlet against the crusades, "first because it is a war, then" etc. (65) That is all! In other places he mentions that Wyclif was opposed to crusades, but does not give the grounds for his opposition. A casual reader of the book would almost certainly get the impression that Wyclif was rather a belligerent person than a pacifist. Prof. Lechler mentions more than once that Wyclif was a strong nationalist and a great patriot that "he energetically defended

(64) Lewis Sergeant, John Wyclif, (New York, 1893).
(65) Lechler, Page 411.

the autonomy, the rights and interests of the kingdom against external influences, and especially in opposition to the Court of Rome." (66) All this is true enough, but it would hardly suggest that Wyclif was heartily against the usual methods of defense of one's country.

The reasons for this virtual unanimity of silence on the part of writers on Wyclif are surely of interest. There is of course one very obvious reason, which excuses several of his biographers. Their prime interest was not his life, nor even his ideas as a whole. Their interest was in his theology. Most of these men were writing in a period when it was still felt in a measure that Protestantism must be justified, and so his ideas on the Sacraments, and on the Eucharist, and on the power of the Pope, have been minutely dissected and compared with the ideas of Hus and of Luther and of the Catholic Church which he so nearly rejected, and of the English Church of which he was a fore-runner. But his other opinions are not often treated. Indeed Prof. Lechler criticizes the earlier work of Dr. Vaughan, because he treated too much of his human relationships and not enough of his theology. "The chief defects of Vaughan's work", he says, "were that he manifested less interest in the speculative and strictly theological element of Wycliffe's writings than in their practical and religious bearing, and that he left almost entirely out of

(66) Ibid, Pages 118 - 119.

consideration his Latin works." (67) Such an attitude as this will at least explain, whether or not it excuses, the absence of Wyclif's opinions on war from such an extended and complete work as that of Professor Lechler.

Another reason for the silence of these writers is that in the time in which they were writing the question of the feasibility of "non-violent coercion" was hardly a live topic. For this reason they would be more apt to consider opinions on this question hardly worth their observation. Prof. Lechler, for instance, deals very, very briefly with the reformer's communistic ideas, as being far too idealistic to be worthy of more than a passing notice. "He had in his mind," he explains, "an ideal of the State; and that is the 'Evangelical State' - which he evidently figures to himself as a commonwealth or commune, in which not rigid right and private property, but love is in the ascendant, and all things are in common - an idea which cannot be absolved from the charge of sanguine idealization." (68) His ideas on war, in the mind of this writer, could doubtless even less be"absolved", and so there is no mention of them whatsoever.

Thus it is that these men in writing about Wyclif gravitated to his theological ideas, because they were so similar to the theological ideas of their own time. The only

(67). Ibid, Page 8. Footnote.
(68). Ibid, Page 329.

one who mentions Wyclif's pacifism is criticized for having strayed from the discussion of the all-important theology. In exactly the same manner, in his study of Wyclif's writings, the present writer gravitated to his thoughts on war, because they seemed of such modern interest. In years to come it is entirely possible that this fourteenth century thinker will be found to have anticipated some other movement of thought. Each age chooses that from a man's opinions which makes him most closely akin to themselves.

VI

The Significance of his Pacifism

It may perhaps be asked - why this careful search through more than thirty volumes of Latin, and several volumes of quaint old English, merely for the purpose of finding out whether a man who has been dead for five hundred and forty years, was, or was not, a pacifist? It is a question well worth asking, but it is also a question to which, in the writer's opinion, an answer can be given which will be satisfying, not merely to the specialist in history, but to those who have only a secondary interest in history as such, and are interested mainly in the bearing it may have on their own lives and opinions.

In the first place, during these days when pacifism, especially a Christian pacifism, seems to be growing and spreading rather rapidly among the younger generation, any fore-runner or prophet of such a movement becomes a person of interest. The fact that practically every principle of action of pacifist groups today which approach the war question from the Christian view-point is foreshadowed in the writings of Wyclif, has significance both in our judgement of pacifism and in our judgement of Wyclif. It is perhaps, another link in the chain of evidence which indicates that the present

movement toward pacifism is not a sudden and unexplainable "mushroom growth," but the blossoming and fruitage of a branch of thought which has had its representatives in every century, and which during the first few centuries of the Christian era, was one of the dominating and characteristic ideas held by all Christians. On the other hand, we have increased respect and admiration for a scholar who, thinking independently without the support of any sect or group, anticipated by more than five hundred years the conclusions of modern groups of Christian pacifists.

More particularly, however, does this tiny bit of research justify itself in the added significance which it gives to Wyclif himself and his place in history. H. W. Clark, in his History of English Nonconformity points out that the ideas of Wyclif cannot be traced to earlier predecessors; he seems to have sprung upon the stage with ideas entirely fresh. (69). This is probably a slight over-statement. We have shown his debt both to the thinking of the common people of his time, and to the Gospels. However it cannot be denied that this study of his opinions on war heightens our regard for his remarkable originality, the astounding independence of his thought. His personality shoots up like a fresh and vivid flame. He looms up out of his generation with his surprisingly modern views on war, with his advanced theological opinions, with his giant

(69). Henry W. Clark, History of English Nonconformity from Wyclif to the close of the Nineteenth Century, (London, 1911), I, Pages 24 - 26.

intellect, and in large measure we seem to be unable to trace his ideas definitely to any other source than his own mind and personality.

The knowledge of his pacifist views, then, makes him to a certain extent more of a riddle - just as all great men are riddles. But it also has what may seem to be a contradictory result - it makes him more human, brings him out of the "musty pages of old parchment," and aligns him with modern interests and problems. We see that he was a man like as we are. The previous generation discussed his theology for the same reason. To men who were vitally interested in the Christian theology of the nineteenth century, it was a matter of great interest to find that most of their theological opinions had been anticipated by an Oxford scholastic of the fourteenth century. And so to us, although we are not supremely interested in how many sacraments there are, nor perhaps in the exact definition of what occurs in the Lord's Supper, it is a matter of very great human interest that the students and others at Evanston who were characterized as the "thirty-eight slackers" asserted the identical opinions of this older student in England, a student who burned with the flame of revelutionary Christianity to the very day of his death.

There is however, still another significance in the

pacifist opinions of Wyclif, that perhaps is of broader although not greater importance than those mentioned. It should be remembered that England in the days of Wyclif was virtually untouched by Humanism - that interest in the classical literature of Rome and of Greece - which was gripping the learned life of Italy. Too often it is supposed that all the vital and original intellectual life of the later Middle Ages sprang from this root. But Wyclif received neither his originality, nor, of course, his pacifism, from the humanistic source. He was a product of medieval thought and life. He was a student of Thomas Aquinas, not of Petrarch. He was the greatest scholastic philosopher of his day. Can we say that the Middle Ages were centuries of ignorance and darkness, that scholasticism was sterile and useless, when out of an environment entirely medieval, and out of the center of scholasticism comes a man whose ideas on theology were scarcely approached for a hundred years after his death, and whose ideas with regard to war would still be considered dangerously advanced? An age of gross ignorance, of petrified thinking, could never have produced a man of such virile and independent and modern thought. Those who have been intimate with Wyclif and with others produced by that much misunderstood period - the so-called Dark Ages - know that men of large calibre, of broad thinking, men of originality and vision, with deep convictions

and the courage to hold them, were the sons of the Middle Ages. And among these John of Wyclif was of the greatest.

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